



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

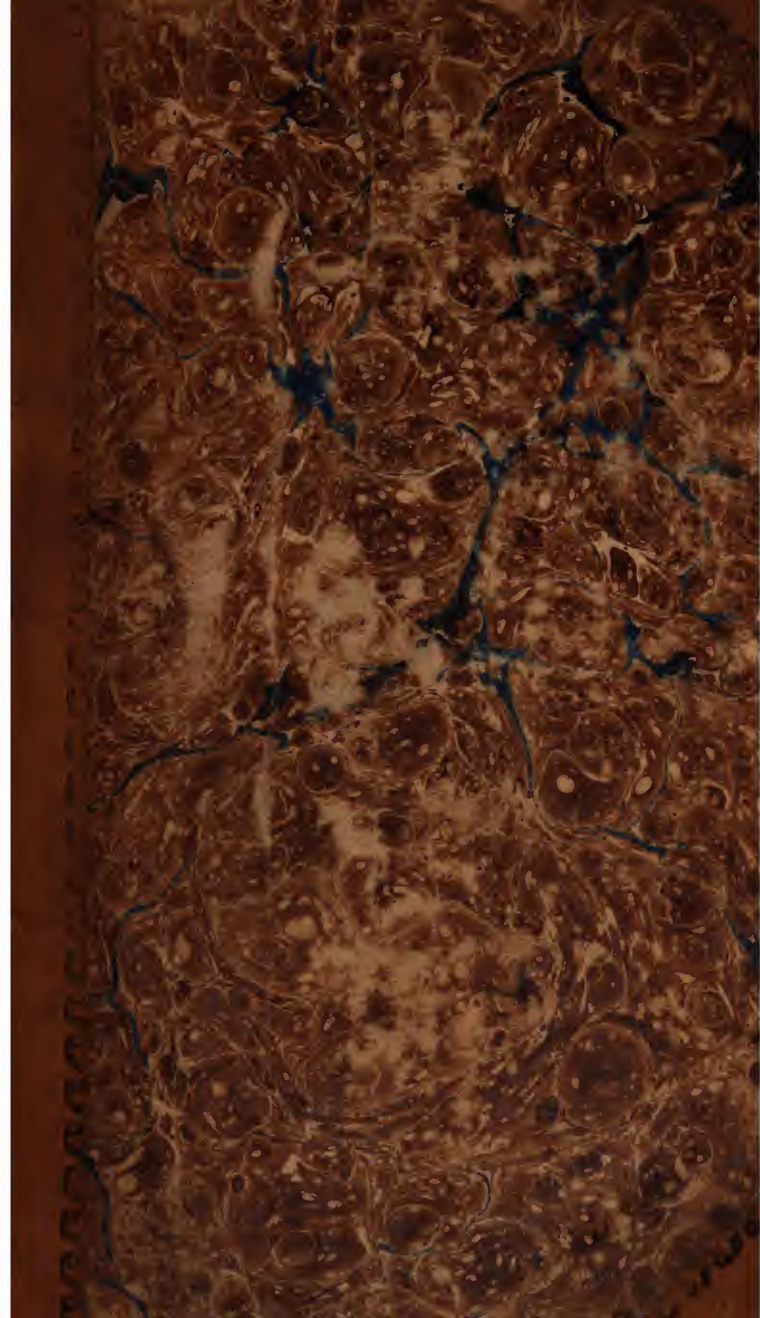
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600003464N

27. 204.

v. S.H. 1820.
THE HISTORY ¹⁴³

OF

THE HOLY BIBLE;

BEING

AN ABRIDGMENT

OF THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT.

ADAPTED TO THE COMPREHENSION OF CHILDREN.

BY CAROLINE MAXWELL.

LONDON:

**PRINTED FOR HARVEY AND DARTON,
GRACECHURCH-STREET.**

1827.

204.



THE HISTORY

OF THE HOLY BIBLE

IN THE

OLD

TESTAMENT

AND THE

NEW TESTAMENT

BY

JOHN CALVIN
OF NEUCHÂTEL

1541

P R E F A C E.

A THOROUGH knowledge of the principles of the Christian religion, being the true foundation of happiness, both in this life and that which is to come, it becomes the indispensable duty of those on whom the care of childhood and early youth devolves, to inculcate the precepts of virtue and morality with the first dawnings of reason; and to impress on the pliant mind of infancy those lessons of truth, religion, and rectitude, which, in all probability, will be remembered to the latest hours of their existence.

To effect this most desirable purpose, no method can be more advisable than an early acquaintance with the sacred writings, and the precepts therein delivered by our blessed Saviour. But the study of the Scriptures cannot be expected from children, who, not comprehending their beauties, do not find them sufficiently attractive or intelligible, to render the perusal any thing more pleasant than a task, which the juvenile reader gladly gets over, without any further attention than to acquit himself without blame or reproach; and with little impression remaining on the memory, as to the purport or circumstances of the

pages he has just read. This apparent consequence has induced the compiler of the little work now offered to the attention and consideration of parents and guardians, to endeavour to form a series of extracts from the sacred writings, which should combine amusement with the most salutary instruction.

To render Scripture reading less prolix; to induce the youthful reader to wish to investigate more fully the grand source from which these pages are drawn; and to contribute to the improvement of their minds and morals, has also been the object of the compiler of this epitome.

Though many works of the same nature have been published with the like good intention; yet, as this is, in many parts, taken from some of the best authors who have presented commentaries on the Holy Scriptures to the public, it is presumed that it will be found adapted to its intended purpose; and at the same time be better suited to the comprehension of children, than the larger works from which it is partly derived.

THE
HISTORY OF THE HOLY BIBLE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD, AND EVERY
LIVING CREATURE IT CONTAINS.

WHEN it pleased God to create this world, and all the living creatures which now inhabit it, He began by forming it out of a confused chaos of matter, without form, or that excellent beauty and admirable order which afterwards appeared in the world: this scene the Scriptures fully describe, and inform us, that God finished this great work in six days. In the first day, that profound darkness which moved upon the face of the waters, by the command of the Almighty was removed; for "God said, Let there be light," and immediately there was light: and he divided the light from the darkness; and the light he called day, and the darkness night.

The second day he made the firmament, (what we call the sky,) and divided the waters which were under and above it, according to his good pleasure, and as it has ever since remained. On the third day, he separated the land from the water, and called the dry land earth, (which we now live on,) and the waters he called seas. God next commanded the earth to bring forth grass, and herbs, and fruits, and flowers, and every thing which was useful and beautiful; and so wisely ordered it, that every kind of fruit might be increased and preserved to all future generations, by setting in the ground the stone which the fruit contains, or the seeds of the flowers, which always are sure to come, after the beauty of the flower is gone and its leaves are faded.

The fourth day, God made those two great luminaries which are in the firmament of the heaven, and which we call the sun and the moon; which were for ever, by their regular motions, to rule the day and the night, and to serve for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years.

On the fifth day, it pleased the Almighty to pass from the creation of inanimate to that of living creatures, and such as are endued with sense and motion; having thus amply provided for their sustenance, by the productions of the

earth, in all that was necessary to sustain life. He therefore, on this day, made the fishes of the sea; and also the fowls of the air, which were ordained to fly in the open firmament; and he blessed all the creatures which he had made.

On the sixth day, God commanded the earth to produce other kinds of living creatures, such as cattle, creeping things, and the beasts of the earth. The same day he created man also, who, though last, was ordained by his Maker to be the most perfect of all his creatures, and for whose sake all other creatures were formed; and to whom he was pleased to give reason and understanding, superior to every other living creature.

On the seventh day, God having finished the whole of what it was his will then to form, he rested, and contemplated the magnificent work he had completed: he pronounced it good, and blessed it accordingly; and, in commemoration of this, he consecrated the seventh day to rest, and to his worship and service.

After the world was thus formed by the power of God, and that a master was given to it in man, who, we are taught, was formed after God's own image, he gave him power and sovereignty over the fish and the fowls, the beasts, and every living thing; and placed him

in a paradise, wherein was every fruit and herb for his use, planted by the hand of his Maker; and wherein he could plentifully enjoy all that could be imagined, in a garden most delightful to the eye, and most gratifying to the taste.

There was, in the midst of that paradise, the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; the fruit of the last of which trees, God strictly commanded him not to eat; and to impress this order more deeply on his remembrance, said, that "in the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." By this command, God gave to the man an opportunity to prove his fidelity to his Maker, and his readiness to obey and attend to the order of his supreme master and only benefactor. He therefore laid this injunction upon him, that he should abstain from the fruit of that tree, but that of every other tree he might eat freely.

After this caution, and warning of the consequences to him if he should fail in his attention to it, every living creature was made to pass in review before the man, (who was called Adam,) to see what he would call them; and whatever name he gave to them, that each has borne ever since.

But Adam, though surrounded thus with every beauty of creation, was not happy, from the want of society, he having no companion,

amongst all that was yet created, suitable to the dignity of his nature. This distress was not unnoticed by his merciful Father, who knew that it was not "good for man to be alone," neither was it his intention that he should be a solitary being. He therefore formed another human being, in a most miraculous manner, and brought to Adam, who, in an ecstasy at the sight of a companion, called her woman; and was thankful to God for this blessing, beyond any other which he enjoyed. Thus were they both placed in paradise, happy and innocent, and with no restriction whatever upon them, but to beware not to touch the fruit of the forbidden tree, which, if they did, they might be assured that they would then "surely die."

CHAP. II.

DISOBEDIENCE.

THE FALL OF ADAM.

Thus happily placed in the garden of Eden, (which was the name of the paradise that God had prepared for them,) Adam and Eve had

scarcely begun to enjoy the pleasures and delights with which it abounded, than the evil spirit, called the devil, who, from being an angel, had fallen in consequence of pride, could not see, without envy, the fidelity and happiness of these two innocent and inoffensive creatures, who were more obedient and subject to God, though they were living upon earth, than he had been; with all the advantages of his spiritual nature, and living in the presence of God. He therefore resolved to try his influence, and endeavour to insinuate himself so sufficiently into their good opinion, as to tempt them to disobey the commandment of God, in which, if he succeeded, he well knew he might, by them, destroy the whole future race of mankind.

To effect his purpose, he disguised himself in the form of a serpent, (which, it is supposed, was at that time very different from what it is now,) which was also the most subtle of all beasts, and entered into conversation with Eve, when she was alone and totally void of fear, concerning the restraint laid upon them by God, to prevent their eating of the Tree of Knowledge. He assured her, that if she did eat of it she would not die; ascribed the prohibition to some other design for keeping them in ignorance; and positively affirmed, that if

they would be guided by him and taste thereof, "that their eyes would be opened, and they would be as gods, knowing good and evil."

Eve, unhappily, was but too easily seduced by his alluring arguments, and was prevailed upon to follow his destructive advice. She looked earnestly upon the fruit which was forbidden her; she saw it was beautiful; she was charmed by its delightful appearance; and felt certain it was as delicious to the taste, as it was attractive to the eye. She put forth her hand, she took it, and she eat thereof. It was thus sin and disobedience entered into the world; for after Eve had eaten of that fatal fruit, she prevailed upon Adam, by the same arguments that the serpent had used with her, to taste it also; and, from that hour, both themselves and all their posterity became liable to be the slaves of sin and death.

The dangers which attended on this act, prove sufficiently the mercy and goodness of God, who, through the mediation of our blessed Saviour, pardoned the guilt of this disobedience; and it ought to inspire us with a just abhorrence against every temptation of the devil, who, remembering always the success of his first artifices, endeavours still to persuade us on all occasions, that we may safely and innocently do that which God hath forbidden us.

But as Eve was made sensible at last, that the threatenings of God were true, and the promises of the tempter false; so ought we, also, always to be on our guard, and never to be prevailed upon to act contrary to the command of God, or be led away by vain promises or allurements, to commit any transgression, which, in the end, will never fail to bring a severe punishment with it.

After our unhappy parents, Adam and Eve, had thus transgressed the will of God, and done what he so expressly warned them against, they were in the utmost distress and horror, ashamed of themselves, and scarcely knowing where to conceal themselves, when they should again hear the voice of God; which, instead of rejoicing at, as they had always hitherto done, they now shrunk from with terror and dismay. The awful voice was, however, at length heard, calling them from the concealment they had sought amongst the trees; and the dreadful disclosure followed, of the sin they had both committed.

God having expressed his high displeasure against them, for their deep offences, pronounced a dreadful sentence against each, which he concluded by saying: "Because thou hast eaten of the tree, cursed be the ground for thy sake: thorns and thistles shall it bring

forth to thee ; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for out of it thou wert taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." He then drove them out of the garden of Eden, and placed a guard of angels about it, to prevent their ever returning there again.

Thus they were expelled out of that most beautiful place, to lament their sin and misery in the other parts of the earth, in which they saw every where the sad effects of their rebellion. They remembered the happiness they were formerly possessed of, and sensible that their present misery was brought upon them by their own misconduct, the melancholy comparison of their past and present condition, which they were then enabled to make from their own woful experience, cast them into the deepest sorrow and repentance.

The only consolation which they then knew, was in the birth of two sons, the eldest of whom was named Cain, who, his mother said, "was a man from the Lord," and the younger, who was named Abel.

CHAP. III.

ENVY AND MALICE.

THE DEATH OF ABEL.

THE two sons of Adam grew up; and, in process of time, Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain was a tiller of the ground. But the grand tempter of mankind; finding he had now got influence on man, determined not to confine his wicked power to Adam and Eve alone; but to extend it over all their race, if so permitted or encouraged. Accordingly, when he perceived that Abel was good—that he was fearful of offending God, and served him faithfully, he turned his machinations towards Cain, and filled his heart with envy and malice against his unoffending brother.

As Abel was a shepherd, and as they had already begun to offer sacrifices to the Almighty, Abel selected the best of his flocks for this divine purpose; and Cain likewise, being a husbandman, brought of the choicest of his fruits, for the sacrifice on the altar erected to the honour of God. But God, who reads the heart, and

knoweth all its most secret movements, saw there the malice of Cain towards his brother, notwithstanding all his endeavours to conceal it: he therefore had no respect for the sacrifice which was offered by a malicious person, but rejected it; whilst, on the contrary, that which was offered by Abel proved acceptable in his sight, and was received by God as a sincere token of his humility and thankfulness. This evident preference so exasperated Cain, that he threw off the mask of dissimulation, and openly showed his hatred and aversion to his brother. Even God himself appeared as though soothing the enmity of Cain, when thus exasperated, by saying: "Why art thou wroth with thy brother? why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest ill, sin lyeth at the door." But even the consoling word of God proved ineffectual upon Cain, whilst his whole soul was possessed by deadly hatred and unjust envy against the innocent Abel; who, unconscious of the dreadful conflict in the breast of Cain, continued to add fresh fuel to his passion, by persevering to pursue the paths of virtue and goodness.

At length, he became completely in the power of the demon, who urged him on to the last deed of wickedness; for, dissembling from Abel the

inconceivable hatred which he bore to him, he went to Abel, and with all the expressions of kindness imaginable, entreated him to walk with him into the fields. To this request Abel immediately consented; for his own good heart, which had never harboured a bad thought, could not have suspected his brother's wickedness or unnatural design: he therefore accompanied him; but, as they were both in the fields together, Cain rose up perfidiously against Abel his brother, and slew him.

The rage and fury of Cain were so extreme, that even the committing this barbarous murder did not make him sensible of the heinousness of his crime; so that when God asked him where Abel was, he could audaciously answer, that he knew not; adding, "Am I my brother's keeper?" But God, well knowing his crime, resolved to make the punishment of Cain, for shedding innocent blood, an example to all future ages, to deter men from the commission of so horrible a sin. With a tremendous voice, therefore, did God reply to him: "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." The Lord then condemned him to be accursed upon the earth, which his hand had defiled with the blood of his brother, and for him to be a fugitive and a vagabond upon the earth,

as long as he should live; putting also a mark upon him, which, whilst it prevented any from slaying him, yet served as a cause why all should shun him; and this, there can be no doubt, was a punishment far more severe than death.

The example of Cain, and the punishment which his crime met with, should serve as a warning, for ever, against envy, pride, and malice. And we should recollect, that there are many who would shrink with horror from the idea of imbruing their hands in blood, yet, who commit murder in their hearts, when they give way to those detestable passions against their fellow-creatures, (who are their brothers,) that but too frequently lead to the most fatal consequences and distressing events.

CHAP. IV.

THE DELUGE, WITH THE PRESERVATION OF NOAH IN THE ARK.

THE same evil spirit which tempted Cain to kill his brother, soon after filled the world with all kinds of wickedness and vice. As men mul-

tiplied upon the earth, so did their impieties increase. Adam was scarcely dead, when the wickedness of his children became so great, that God became incensed against them, and he determined to punish them with an unheard-of severity; for he saw, with the utmost indignation, that "the imagination of men's hearts was only evil continually." Therefore, as he found scarcely any thing of his own image remaining in that degenerate creature, it grieved him that he had made man on the earth; because he was dishonouring and polluting it with his vices, contrary to the first design of his creation, which was, that he should be the glory and chiefest ornament of all terrestrial creatures.

God therefore resolved to destroy and extirpate man from the face of the earth, and with him every living thing which he had formed. Yet, in that moment of anger against a sinful race, he remembered, that in the "midst of the general corruption which had taken place, there was yet one just man, who had kept his innocence, and who was free from the impieties of all around." That just man was Noah, who found grace in the eyes of the Lord: it was he whom God selected as the means of saving the world from entire destruction, by preserving a remnant of its present inhabitants from the

overwhelming devastation which he intended to bring upon it.

When the time, therefore, was arrived, which God had appointed by his holy will, for purifying the earth by the flood, from the pollution which the wicked inhabitants had brought upon it, he commanded Noah to build an ark, which was to preserve him and all that were with him, from the miserable fate intended for those who had offended the Almighty. God likewise condescended to instruct Noah in what manner he should build the ark, with the exact measures and proportions it was to have, in order to render it a secure retreat in the approaching danger.

Noah did every thing according to the command of the Lord; and, though this great work took an hundred years to build it in, and that all the people about him saw the surprising thing he was forming, and likewise knew the purpose it was intended for; yet were their folly and insensibility such, that they took no warning, from the preparation of Noah, to reform their wicked lives, or to implore pardon for their past offences; but continued in their accustomed wickedness, till the dreadful calamity at length overwhelmed them.

When the ark was finally completed, God ordered Noah to provide and carry into the ark

all necessary provisions, both for his own family, and for all the creatures he was to take with him. Of every clean beast, he was to take by sevens; of every unclean, only by twos. After all these orders had been fully executed, Noah entered into the ark himself, with his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japhet; his wife, and the three wives of his sons; and when they were entered, "God shut them in," which was no sooner done, than the waters poured down from the heavens for forty days and nights successively, and broke out from the deep in such an abundance, as soon overflowed and covered the face of the whole earth. Nay, the waters prevailed over the highest hills and mountains, so that, in this inundation, "all flesh perished, both of men, of fowls, of beasts, and of every creeping thing upon the earth."

After the earth had been thus overflowed for one hundred and fifty days, and all creatures drowned, God remembered Noah, and every living creature that was with him in the ark; and he caused a great wind to pass over the earth, so that the waters were soon abated; and seven months after, from the first day of the flood, the ark rested upon the mountains of Armenia.

Four months after this, Noah opened the window of the ark, and sent forth a raven; but

it returned not to the ark again. Seven days afterward, he again opened his window, and sent forth a dove; but the dove, as yet finding no resting-place, returned again to the ark, and was received by Noah into it. Seven days from this time, he sent forth the same dove, and she returned to him in the evening, bringing in her bill a green olive-leaf, plucked off the tree; which joyful sight convinced Noah and his family, that God, being reconciled to the world, had now prepared for his quitting the confinement they had so long endured.

On the happy intelligence thus conveyed by the innocent dove, Noah immediately uncovered the ark, and with delight and wonder saw that the waters were dried up; and receiving an order from God to quit the ark, wherein he had been a whole year, he went out, with his wife and children, and every living creature that was therein.

The first thing that Noah and his family did, the moment they landed from the ark, was to build an altar to God, and humbly to return thanks to him, for their miraculous preservation. God graciously accepted their prayers, and made a promise to destroy the earth no more; and, as a proof of his forgiveness, he formed the rainbow, to the intent that whenever it should appear in the clouds, it should be a token

that he remembered his covenant, and that no second inundation should ever take place.

The rainbow, therefore, is a certain security of his goodness to us; and whenever we see it, it ought to remind us of his power to punish sinners when it is his will, and of his mercy to the good; and also that it is our duty to bless and praise him, whenever it appears.

CHAP. V.

THE BUILDING OF BABEL, &c.

THE children of Noah increased so rapidly, that in a few years they found it would be impossible for them to continue longer together, and therefore they came to a resolution of dispersing themselves about, and forming settlements in other countries. But before their intended separation, they undertook an enterprise which has been condemned as vain and presumptuous, and, consequently, was not permitted by God to prosper; for, "as they journeyed from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar,

where they dwelt. And they said one to another, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

But this work not meeting the approbation of the Almighty, and not being begun by his command, he, in a most wonderful manner, interrupted it, by causing the people engaged in it, who at first all spoke one language, to be so confounded by the introduction of different languages amongst them, that they could not in the least understand one another. "So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of the earth; and they left off to build the city; therefore the place is called Babel."

After this, and that the men who began this presumptuous building which they had boasted should reach unto heaven, were thus defeated in their design, God thought fit to select Abram to be the head of a race of people which should never end. This holy man dwelt with his father, Terah, in the city of Ur, which was an idolatrous country. It was there that God commanded him, saying, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee; and I will make thee the head and father of a great people, &c. and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Abram, without any delay or hesitation, believed the word of God, which promised him two such great advantages: the first, to make him the head of a great people; and the second, to bless all the world in him. So he left his own native country, taking with him Terah his father, and came to Haran, a city in Mesopotamia, where his father died; after whose death, he left that city, and, with Sarai his wife, and Lot, his brother's son, he came into the land of Canaan, where God again promised to give him all that land. And Abram there built an altar to the Lord, to return his thanks, and to call upon the name of the Lord for ever.

A great famine, about this period, compelled Abram to reside in the land of Egypt, where many circumstances occurred to him, which proved more and more fully he was protected by God in all events, and how miraculously he directed every thing to render this great patriarch happy and powerful.

After the famine had subsided, Abram returned out of Egypt, with Sarai his wife, and Lot, his brother's son, to the place of their former abode. And here he was soon made sensible of the troubles which always attend on riches; for both Lot and Abram, having become very wealthy, there were frequent and severe quarrels between their herdsmen, which

made it evident, "that they could no longer live together," and that "one land was not able to bear them both."

Abram, exceedingly hurt at the continual dissensions which took place amongst their domestics, and fearful that at last it might involve himself and his nephew in some disagreeable contention, resolved to terminate all further dispute by a sudden separation; and addressing Lot, he thus said to him: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between thee and me; and between thy herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we be brethren."

Lot, without due consideration of the great disadvantage it would be to him, to separate himself from so great and good a man as Abram was; immediately consented to this proposal, and launched himself into a sea of troubles and dangers by this imprudent conduct. For, thinking only on the most lucrative situation in which to fix himself, he resolved to settle in that country which promised most present advantage; and therefore, "Lifting up his eyes, he beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where as the garden of the Lord." This inducement readily influenced him to fix his abode in the cities of that tempting and fruitful valley, and to pitch his tent near Sodom.

Unfortunately for Lot, the situation he had

chosen was in the neighbourhood of a city whose wickedness was so great, that God determined to punish it by a signal judgment. But Lot, being a righteous man, the Lord was pleased to warn him and his family of the destruction which would come upon the devoted city of Sodom, by the visitation of two angels, who came to Lot for that purpose, and whom he received and hospitably entertained, before he knew that they were such holy spirits; but fully understanding the danger he was in, entreated permission from the angels to retire into the place named Zoar, which he had no sooner entered, than "the Lord rained down brimstone and fire out of heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants, and all which grew upon the ground."

Thus were Lot and his family (except his wife, who was turned into a pillar of salt, for her disobedience on looking back on the city she had left, contrary to the command of the angels) miraculously preserved and delivered from the dreadful fate which had befallen every other creature residing in those wicked cities.

CHAP. VI.

OF ISAAC AND ISHMAEL.

GOD, in fulfilment of a promise which he had made to Abram, granted to his prayers a son in his old age, who was named Isaac. He became the darling of his aged parents; and, as a proof of their joy, at the time when Isaac was to be weaned, Abram made a great feast, with every thing attending on it which could manifest his happiness and his gratitude to God, for the blessing given him in this son.

It so happened, that Abram had another son, whose mother was a bondwoman in Abram's house; and this son was named Ishmael, of whom Abram had been exceedingly fond, before the birth of Isaac. When Ishmael saw all the preparations which were making to celebrate this day of rejoicing, jealousy and envy entered into his mind, even young as he was; for this lad, finding himself frustrated in his great hopes of inheriting all his father's wealth,

by the birth of Isaac, he could not endure to see the joy his father took in him, without conceiving a secret dislike and envy towards the inoffensive Isaac; neither could he so far conceal it, as to avoid some expressions which but too fully proved his sentiments of vexation on this grand occasion.

Sarah, who overheard his observations, foresaw the fatal consequences which this growing hatred might entail upon her son, whom she knew was designed by God as the heir of Abraham; she therefore earnestly entreated him "to cast out the bondwoman and her son."

This request seeming very harsh and grievous to Abraham, greatly afflicted him; but being admonished by God on the necessity of complying, "he arose up early in the morning, and took a loaf of bread, and a bottle of water, and gave them to Hagar, (the mother of Ishmael,) and sent her away with her son."

Hagar, thus turned out, wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba, where the water and provisions being all consumed, in despair she cast her son under a shrub, and went herself and sat down a good way off, that she might not see him die; an event which she then thought was inevitable, from the distress and fatigue they had sustained. But whilst she was weeping and lamenting the sad fate of herself and her

son, an angel from heaven spoke comfortably to her, and commanded her to take up her son ; telling her, that God had heard the voice of the child, and would make him the father of a great nation. The angel then permitted her to discover that a well of water was near. Hagar, comforted by this divine assurance, and the seasonable supply of water, for which, in those hot climates the traveller languishes, soon recovered Ishmael from the fainting state she had left him in; and, fixing her abode in the wilderness, she there educated her son, where he became a dexterous archer, and, in time, "his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt."

Ishmael being thus turned out of his father's house, Isaac continued there in peace, and, being now grown up, God, to try Abraham's faith, commanded him to take his son, his only son, Isaac, whom he loved, and offer him up as a sacrifice, on a mountain he would point out to him.

Abraham, who thankfully remembered he had received this son from God, made no difficulty to surrender that gift back to the donor, when called upon so to do. Accordingly, he arose early in the morning, and keeping this important enterprise secret in his breast, took

Isaac, and two servants, and went to the place of which God had told him. Having spent two days in his journey, (during which, neither his faith nor courage ever deserted him,) on the third he lifted up his eyes, and saw, afar off, the place appointed for this awful sacrifice. And having charged his servants to stay at the foot of the mountain, whilst he and his son went up to worship God, he then took the wood for the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac, who cheerfully went up the mountain, laden with the wood designed to consume himself.

Whilst Isaac was thus climbing the mountain with his father, who carried the fire and the sacrificing knife in his hands, he asked his father, where the lamb was, that was designed for the burnt offering; and Abraham answered him, without betraying any emotion, "My son, God will provide himself of a lamb;" and being arrived at the place appointed by God, he there built an altar, laid the wood in order upon it, and binding his son, placed him upon the altar on the wood, and stretched forth his hand to take the knife to slay him.

But God, who had only permitted this trial, to prove the faith and constancy of Abraham, and the submission of Isaac, stopped his hand by an angel from heaven, who said to him: "Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do

thou any thing to him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

And Abraham, after this joyful interposition of God to save his beloved son, lifted up his eyes, and saw "a ram, caught in the thicket by his horns," and offered him up, instead of his son; after which, he returned to his house. And thus was Isaac restored to his parents, by the command of Him who first bestowed him on them.

Soon after this wonderful event, Sarah, the mother of Isaac, died; and Abraham, being now very old, was most anxious to provide a wife for his son, from amongst his own countrywomen, before his death. For this purpose, he called his steward, Eliezer, and ordered him to go into Mesopotamia, and there to select a wife for his son.

Eliezer, though sensible of the difficulty of the business he was commanded to perform, nevertheless undertook it without making any objection; but, being come near the city of Nabor, he there earnestly prayed to God, for his assistance in this task, and that he would be pleased to point out to him the person whom he designed to be the wife of his master's son, by this token: that, when the damsels of the city

came to draw water, she who, at his request, should draw water freely; not only for him, but for his camels also, might be the wife appointed for Isaac.

Before he had made an end of his prayers, Rebecca, a damsel fair and lovely, the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out of the city to draw water; and having filled her pitcher, Eliezer ran to meet her, and desired some water to drink, which she most readily gave him, and then hastened to draw water for his camels. The faithful servant, convinced by this that undoubtedly she was the person ordained by God to be his young master's wife, immediately presented her with a jewel for her forehead, and bracelets, in acknowledgment for her kindness, and demanded of her, whose daughter she was, and whether there was convenience in her father's house to lodge him and his company? To which, receiving an answer suitable to his wishes, she made haste home, to acquaint her family with what had taken place.

Laban, her brother, having heard his sister's report, and seen the jewels and bracelets Abraham's servant had given her, ran out and desired him to come in. Eliezer being entered, and refreshments set before him, he protested he would neither eat nor drink, till he received

an answer on the business on which he was sent. He then acquainted them, that he was Abraham's servant; that God had blessed his master, and made him rich and powerful; and who now, resolving to seek a wife for his son, had sent him to fetch one from amongst his kindred: that, arriving in that neighbourhood, and praying for God's assistance in this arduous work, by the divine inspiration, which had, in consequence of his supplication, been granted, he was assured that Rebecca was the person appointed; and demanded of them, whether they were willing to let her go with him for that purpose?

Bethuel and Laban, perceiving the finger of God in the whole conduct of this affair, instantly gave their consent; whereupon Eliezer brought forth vessels of gold and silver, and jewels, which he presented to Rebecca and to her relations. The next day he prepared himself to return to his master; but Rebecca's relations being unwilling to part with her so suddenly, urged him to tarry some days with them. But Eliezer refusing, Rebecca was called for, (whom they had disposed of without asking her consent,) to know whether she were willing to go with Eliezer; and as she did not object, he returned with speed to his master.

As Eliezer drew nigh the house, he beheld

Isaac walking in the fields; whereupon, having informed Rebecca who he was, she alighted from her camel to veil herself. In the mean time, Eliezer gave an account of his journey to Isaac, who took Rebecca immediately for his wife; and such was his love for her, that the sorrow which he felt for the loss of his mother, was overpowered by the pleasure the arrival of his fair bride gave him.

CHAP. VII.

OF JACOB AND ESAU.

AFTER the happy marriage of Isaac and Rebecca, Abraham lived many years, and had the satisfaction of testifying his faithfulness to God to his last breath: he lived to be an hundred and seventy-five years old.

After the death of Abraham, God multiplied blessings on his son Isaac, to whom two sons were born: they were twins, but very unlike in person and disposition; the eldest, who was named Esau, being red and hairy; the younger,

Jacob, being smooth and fair. When these two children were grown up, it happened, one day, that Jacob was seething some lentil pottage; and Esau returning at the same time from hunting, which was his general employment, and being extremely tired and hungry, longed exceedingly for some of Jacob's pottage. Jacob perceiving this, would not part with it, till he had agreed to sell him his birthright in consideration of it; which Esau, being stimulated by excessive hunger, readily consented to do.

Esau having thus sold his birthright, Rebecca, their mother, whose love for Jacob was excessive, got the same ratified to him, many years afterwards, by a stratagem, which is attributed to holy zeal.

Isaac being now old and infirm, became anxious to bless his children before his death; and calling to him his eldest son, Esau, whom he tenderly loved, thus spake to him: "Take thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison, and make me savory meat, such as I love, that my soul may bless thee before I die."

Rebecca hearing this injunction given to Esau, immediately acquainted Jacob with what had passed, and bade him fetch her two kids, that she might make savory meat for his father, such as he loved. Jacob having obeyed his

mother in this order, she made haste to dress them, after such a manner as she knew her husband liked best. In the mean time, she took the goodly raiment of Esau, and put it upon Jacob, and she put the skins upon his hands and the smooth of his neck, to the end, that his father, whose sight failed him, might be deceived; for, though he might think the voice Jacob's, yet notwithstanding, by the hairiness of the neck and hands, he might still imagine it to be Esau.

Jacob, thus disguised by the contrivance of his mother, came to his father, and desired him to eat of the venison he had prepared. Isaac being surprised to hear a voice which resembled Jacob's, bade him come near him, that he might feel whether he were his very son Esau or no; when, feeling the hair of the kid-skins, he said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

After he had eaten, as he went to kiss Jacob, he smelled the scent of his garments, and blessing him, said, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed: therefore, God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine. Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee; be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed

be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be every one that blesseth thee."

Scarcely had Isaac finished this blessing, when Esau returned from hunting; and having prepared his savory meat, he brought it to his father, and desired him to eat of his venison, that his soul might bless him.

The holy patriarch perceiving his mistake, was exceedingly surprised and distressed, inso-much that he trembled very much, and informed his son of what had taken place during his absence; but, assured that it had been the will of God that it should so have happened, he confirmed and ratified the blessing irrevocably. Esau, hearing all this from his father's mouth, cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry, "Bless me, even me also, O my father." And then, reflecting on and complaining of the deceit of his brother, he asked his father, whether he had not yet one blessing in reserve for him.

Isaac, moved by the deep distress and bitter cries of his son Esau, blessed him also, but so as to subject him to his brother; which made him conceive such an implacable hatred against Jacob, that he waited only the death of his father, that he might kill him.

The anger of Esau being thus vehement against his brother, for beguiling him of his father's blessing, the prudence of Rebecca, their

mother, suggested to her the necessity of separating them from each other, till the wrath of Esau should be mitigated or entirely effaced. To accomplish this end, she persuaded Isaac that it would be proper for Jacob to choose a wife from amongst his own relations; and entreated that he would permit him to go into Mesopotamia, to Bethuel, her father, and there he might provide him a wife, who would be approved by them both. To this proposal Isaac immediately consented; and calling Jacob to him, and renewing the blessings he had formerly bestowed on him, he charged him to go and choose a wife from the daughters of Laban, his mother's brother.

It was thus that Jacob left his native country, rather as a poor fugitive, flying to avoid the anger of his enraged brother, than as a wealthy person on a visit of friendship to his nearest relations; and, whilst thus travelling, he came into a field, where, in consequence of the approaching night, he was forced to take up his lodging, having no other bed but the earth, or any softer pillow to rest his head upon but a stone; yet, even on this, he fell into a sound sleep. But the meanness of the lodging did not debar him from the divine presence and favour of God; for he had a miraculous dream, wherein he beheld a ladder, the foot whereof

stood upon the earth, and the top reached to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it. He heard also, in his dream, the voice of God, confirming to him, in a sacred promise, that all the blessings which his father had bestowed upon him should be fulfilled. Jacob, on awakening from his sleep, was amazed at the glory of the vision; and, full of faith and confidence, pursued his way to his uncle Laban's habitation.

CHAP. VIII.

OF JACOB AND RACHEL.

JACOB, thus assured of God's protection, most cheerfully proceeded on his way to Haran; and, meeting with some shepherds by the way, near a well in the field, which had a great stone on the mouth thereof, where they used to water their flocks, he asked them, whether they knew Laban, the grandchild of Nahor. They answered, they knew him well; and that Rachel, his daughter, was coming thither with his sheep,

to water them at the well. Jacob no sooner saw her coming, than he went and rolled away the stone from the well's mouth, and watered her flock; and having made himself known to her, Rachel hastened to tell her father, Laban, who, when he heard the news, ran forth, and embracing and kissing Jacob, brought him into the house.

Laban, understanding it was the wish of Jacob to continue with him, readily complied with his desire; but would not suffer him to do so, without paying him a recompense for his time and services. Jacob then made a bargain with him, to serve him seven years, to obtain Rachel, his youngest daughter, for his wife. To this Laban likewise consented; but, at the end of the seven years, he compelled him to take Leah, his eldest daughter, instead; saying, in excuse for his breach of promise, that the younger should not be married before the elder; and adding, that he would give him Rachel also, if he would serve another seven years for her. This request Jacob joyfully complied with, from the extreme love which he bore to Rachel; and he faithfully fulfilled his engagement with Laban, for the sake of Rachel.

At the expiration of the fourteen years, Jacob became desirous of returning with his wives and children into his own country; but Laban,

aware of the advantages which were the consequence of Jacob's good management of his affairs, earnestly conjured him to stay longer with him, for which he would give him whatever he required. Jacob then mentioned the terms on which he would continue, which Laban immediately granted; and he continued to take the care of all his flocks and herds for six years longer.

At this period, Jacob became sensible that Laban began to envy him the blessings which God bestowed upon him, and thought it would be most prudent for them to separate; in which he was likewise encouraged by the command of God, ordering him to return to the place of his nativity. Whereupon Jacob, considering the necessity of obeying this command, resolved to do it as secretly as possible. For this purpose, he consulted with his two wives, and acquainted them with his design, which they approved, and agreed to follow him. So Jacob, availing himself of an opportunity during Laban's absence, went his way privately, taking his family and all his possessions with him.

Laban being informed of Jacob's sudden and unexpected departure, and missing some of his idols, which Rachel (unknown to her husband) had taken with her, in a transport of passion he pursued them for seven days, and at last over-

took them upon mount Gilead. As soon as they met, Laban reproached Jacob for basely stealing away from him, and carrying off his daughters, as captives taken by the sword. He told him, it was ill done to conceal his departure, and to prevent him taking a last farewell of his children, and showing his parental tenderness towards them; and concluded, that, however he might excuse himself by the desire he had to return to his native country and his father's house, yet, that robbing him of his idols was unjust, and for which he could have no plea.

Jacob at these words interrupted him; and having, as well as he could, excused the privacy of his departure, denied the taking away of the idols, and gave him leave to kill the party with whom they should be found. Laban, after a strict but fruitless search, entered the tent of Rachel; but she having well concealed them, sat down on the covering which was over them, and entreated her father to excuse her for not rising up to receive him. Laban, therefore, not finding them, Jacob sharply expostulated with him, for his unjust and harsh dealings towards him. But at length, the spirits of each becoming more calm, they became perfectly reconciled: they made a covenant to be reciprocally observed; and having lovingly feasted together, they took leave of each other, and separated.

Jacob, having thus escaped the hands of Laban, thought of nothing now but how he might escape those of his brother Esau; in order to which, he sent messengers before him unto Seir, to acquaint his brother, in the most respectful and submissive manner imaginable, that, having sojourned with Laban in Mesopotamia for several years, he was then upon his return to his father's house; and that the occasion of his sending to him was, "that he might find favour in his sight."

The messengers, upon their return, informed Jacob, that, as soon as they had delivered their message to his brother, he had put himself at the head of four hundred armed men, and was now upon the march to meet him.

This intelligence greatly alarmed Jacob; but, praying earnestly to God for protection in this danger, and fixing his confidence on his divine assistance, he began to make use of all his natural prudence, to calm his brother's anger, and to effect a reconciliation. The best method to bring this about, he thought, would be to present him with a part of his numerous flocks and herds; and having set apart such a quantity of his cattle, sheep, and camels, as he judged adequate to the occasion, he gave express directions to his people how to conduct themselves towards Esau; hoping, that the value of his pre-

sents, and the humble submission of those who offered them to him in the name of their master, would soften his heart towards his brother.

As soon as Jacob had made all the preparations which he conceived necessary for this formidable meeting, he perceived Esau afar off, coming at the head of his four hundred men; and having ranged his family in the order he thought best, he passed on before them to meet Esau. As he came near him, he bowed himself seven times to the ground before him. Esau, not being able to resist the powerful impression which Jacob's submissive conduct made upon him, ran to meet him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him; and all his former anger was now turned into such tenderness and affection, that he could not refrain from tears as he embraced his brother. With the utmost pleasure he beheld Jacob's wives and children; and could scarcely be prevailed upon to accept the presents designed for him.

After this, Esau, to show his kindness further to his brother, offered to bear him company, and with his armed men to guard his family and property on their journey. But Jacob representing to him how necessary it was for him to travel gently, on account of the tender age of his children, and his numerous flocks, which, he said, if overdriven but for one day,

would certainly die, he entreated Esau to march on before them to mount Seir, where he would not fail to wait upon him. Thus Jacob, by his prudent management, by his gentleness and conciliating manner, not only avoided the anger of his brother, who had sworn his destruction, but even changed that fierce wrath into tenderness and brotherly affection.

CHAP. IX.

OF JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN.

JACOB, who had so lately escaped these dangers, soon after met with an affliction in his own house, which was the more grievous, as it was occasioned by his own children.

Joseph, the son of Rachel, and the last child which was born to Jacob in Mesopotamia, had, at the age of sixteen, accused his brethren to his father, of some crime which the Scripture does not mention. This presumption of a younger brother, added to the tender affection which his father had for him, produced so great

a degree of envy against him, that they could not so much as speak friendly to him.

Their hatred was likewise further increased, by his acquainting them with two dreams which he had dreamed, which plainly presaged his future elevation. This not only gave additional offence to his brethren, but occasioned him a reproof from his father, who was angry with him, for repeating, what appeared to him, to place the rest of his children in a humiliating situation. Not long after this, Joseph being sent on a visit to his brethren, who fed their flocks in Shechem, they, seeing him coming afar off, conspired together to kill him; but Reuben, their eldest brother, abhorring their detestable design, and concealing his resolution of saving him, advised them not to dip their hands in the blood of their brother, but to satisfy their revenge by casting him into a pit, hoping thereby to save him, and restore him again to his father. They approved of Reuben's advice; and, stripping him of his coat of many colours, which his father had caused to be made for him as a proof of his affection, let him down into the pit.

“ And they sat them down to eat bread, and they lift up their eyes, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels, going into Egypt. And Judah said, What

profit is it if we slay our brother? let us sell him, and let not our hand be upon him; and they were content." The rest of Joseph's brothers, taking advantage of the absence of Reuben, thought this would be a favourable opportunity of getting rid of him; so they drew him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver, and these people brought Joseph into Egypt.

"And Reuben returned to the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned to his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid, and dipped the coat in the blood of the kid, and sent it to their father."

Jacob, at the first sight, well knew it was the garment of his beloved son, and concluded that a wild beast had devoured him; upon which he was seized with the most violent sorrow: he rent his garments, put on sackcloth, and mourned many days; and his sons and daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to listen to them.

Joseph, thus treacherously banished from his father's house, was brought into Egypt, and sold to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, and captain of his guard. And God, who never abandons the innocent, caused Joseph to meet

with more kindness in a strange country, than he had found in his own home from his brethren. His prudence, moderation, and fidelity, gained him his master's heart, who, perceiving clearly the great merit of his young bondsman, made him his steward.

But the wickedness of Potiphar's wife was so great, and the stories she told against Joseph to her husband so very irritating, that Potiphar, though a good man, believing what she said, was so incensed against Joseph, that he cast him "into the king's prison;" his wrath against him now making him as severe, as he had before been merciful and good to him, and too vehement to allow Joseph to say any thing in his own defence.

Joseph being thus cast into prison, though perfectly free from any crime, made his innocence appear by his good conduct there; for, in every part of his behaviour, he gave such evidences of his virtue and wisdom, that the keeper trusted to his care all the prisoners.

Meanwhile, two of Pharaoh's officers, his chief butler and his chief baker, having offended their lord, were put into the same prison with Joseph, and there dreamed two very significant dreams, which Joseph interpreted to them: to the baker he foretold, that, within three days he should have his head cut off; and to the

butler, that within three days he should be restored to the favour of Pharaoh and to his usual situation; and he concluded, by intreating the butler not to forget his unhappy situation, when he was again placed in possession of his former honours.

But this solicitation the butler entirely forgot, till, about two years afterwards, when, in consequence of Pharaoh having had two wonderful dreams, which none of his magicians could interpret, it was then that this officer called to mind Joseph, the dream which he himself had had when in prison, and the just interpretation which he had made of it.

The anxiety of the king on the occasion of his dreams, induced the butler to mention Joseph to him: he was therefore immediately sent for, to be consulted; and when he had heard the king relate the particulars of the two dreams which perplexed his mind, Joseph informed him, that they signified seven years of great plenty, which were to be succeeded by seven other years of the extremest famine; to prevent the fatal effects whereof, he counselled the king to erect storehouses throughout the land, and to lay up the surplus of the plentiful years, to serve for a supply during the years of famine.

The king, struck with wonder at the wisdom and prudence of Joseph, concluded that none

could be so fit to manage an affair of such importance, as the person who conceived and proposed it; and, accordingly, he conferred upon him full power to act in all things as he judged best for the general advantage, and ratified this honour, by investing him with the ensigns proper to his new dignity.

CHAP. X.

OF JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN, CONTINUED.

JOSEPH, having received from king Pharaoh so unlimited a power, soon made it appear how happy the king had been in the choice he had made; for he applied himself most assiduously to provide for the good of all the people committed to his care, by laying up an abundant supply for the seven future years of famine, without causing any want or scarcity in the midst of that plenty which preceded it.

The land of Canaan, where Jacob and his family resided, suffered extremely by the severity of the famine; but Jacob, hearing that there was

corn in Egypt, he ordered his sons to go thither, and buy some for the use of the family. Accordingly, Jacob's ten sons, being all his family, (except Benjamin, the youngest, whom he could not bear to part from,) went to buy corn in Egypt, and presented themselves, amongst many others, before Joseph their brother.

Joseph knew his brethren the moment he beheld them; but not seeing Benjamin with them, began to be afraid they had acted as cruelly by him, as they had formerly done by himself; to discover which, he spake harshly to them, and said to them, that they were spies, come to discover the weakness of the land.

His brethren, in vindicating themselves from this accusation, informed him, that they were all the sons of one father, who lived in the land of Canaan, where they had left him with their youngest brother. Joseph, rejoiced at hearing, by this stratagem, that his father and brother yet lived, determined, however, still to continue the same behaviour towards them; and said, that he should retain one of them as a hostage for the truth of what they had told him, till the rest returned home, and brought back with them their youngest brother.

In this unexpected extremity it was, that the recollection of their treatment of Joseph distressed them beyond description; and they im-

puted the misfortunes which now attended them to that wicked act. These reflections they made in their own language to each other ; but it was well understood by Joseph, whose heart was touched with pity for them, and he turned aside to conceal his tears. But presently recovering, he took Simeon from amongst them, and confined him, permitting the rest to return home: he likewise commanded that all their sacks should be filled with corn, and that each one's money should be put in the mouth of his sack.

As soon as they had returned, they told their father all that happened, and that they had been forced to leave Simeon bound, until they returned and took Benjamin with them, to present to the governor of the country. Jacob was greatly afflicted on hearing this sad intelligence; and recalling the loss of his beloved Joseph to his remembrance, told them plainly, that on no terms whatever would he consent to part with his beloved Benjamin, lest, losing him also, it would bring his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

But the famine still continuing to rage with unabated violence, forced Jacob to a resolution of sending Benjamin, rather than die of hunger, which must inevitably happen, should they not send to Egypt for a fresh supply of provi-

sions, though he feared his own death would be the consequence of the separation. Judah encouraged his father in this necessary resolution more than any of his other sons, by assuring him, that he would be responsible for Benjamin, and bring him safe back.

They then departed, with the presents which they had prepared for the governor, to render him more lenient to them. Joseph, on seeing they had returned and brought their brother with them, ordered that they might be conducted into the house, to dine with him. They were astonished at this unexpected kindness; and fearful of some new trouble, on account of the money which they had found in their sacks, they therefore applied to Joseph's steward, and acquainted him with the circumstance, and further, that they had brought it back to him, and requested him to receive it.

But the steward declined taking it, saying, he had had their money, and then brought Simeon out to them. Joseph then entered, when they all bowed low before him, and presented to him the gifts their father had sent, which he graciously received; and discoursing kindly with them, enquired after the health of their father. Then, looking upon Benjamin, who was the son of his own mother, he was nearly overcome with emotion, and withdrew to conceal

it; but soon recovering his usual serenity, he sat down to dinner, though at a separate table.

After a day thus spent in joy and feasting, the brothers prepared to depart for Canaan. Joseph commanded their sacks to be filled, and their money to be returned as at first; and also, that his favourite and valuable cup should be put into Benjamin's sack. But they were no sooner got out of the town, than Joseph sent his steward after them, who reproached them with having returned evil for good, in stealing his master's cup. With one voice they denied being guilty of so great a crime; and consented that he who should be found guilty should die, and the rest should be his slaves. The search was accordingly made, and in Benjamin's sack the cup was found. At this discovery, astonishment and dismay overwhelmed their senses; and, in the deepest affliction, they rent their clothes, at a loss for words to express the severity of their grief and despair.

But Judah, who had so solemnly engaged himself to his father, to bring back his darling son free from injury, was doubly distressed; and, with a heart oppressed and wounded with sorrow, he returned, together with all his brethren, to Joseph's palace; and there, in a most pathetic and respectful manner, addressed Joseph, humbly represented the promise which

he had made—the fatal consequence it would be to his father, should they return without his brother; and, finally, offering himself to remain in bondage, so that he would but permit the lad to return in safety to his father.

Joseph, being completely overcome by this powerful appeal to his feelings, could hold out no longer: he burst into a flood of tears, and, to their utter consternation and surprise, exclaimed, “I am Joseph, your brother.” Scarcely could they believe the sound they heard was real, so utterly unexpected was this amazing discovery; till Joseph, to relieve the confusion which overpowered them, told them to be comforted; for that God, in his providence, had so ordered it, that his being sold, as he had been, should be the means of preserving all their lives, and many thousands more. He then embraced and wept over them, and bade them make haste to his father, that he and his family might come down into Egypt, in the carriages he would send to convey them.

As this history of Joseph can never be repeated in any language equal to the Scripture, the youthful reader is referred to it, beginning in the 37th chapter of Genesis, where it will be found at length, recorded in the most beautiful and interesting manner.

CHAP. XI.

JACOB GOES INTO EGYPT.

As soon as Joseph's brethren were returned into Canaan, and had told the glad and extraordinary tidings, that "Joseph was yet alive," and governor over the whole land of Egypt, the holy patriarch, struck by the strangeness of such an unexpected blessing, amidst a struggle of contending passions, fainted away. When he recovered, he enquired more particularly concerning his son Joseph; and was now fully satisfied, not only by the account given him by his sons, who had seen and conversed with him, but also by the chariots Pharaoh had sent, and the provision Joseph had made for their commodious travelling. His spirits, therefore, revived, as he became assured of the truth, and he said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die."

Joseph, being apprized by his brother Judah, that his father was coming, made ready his chariot, and went to Goshen to meet him;

and being come near, he stepped down and presented himself before his father, embraced him, fell upon his neck, and wept; so that neither of them was able for some time to speak a word, from the vast transport of joy which they each felt in this happy meeting. After this passion of joy and tears, which so affectionate an interview had forced from them, Joseph brought his father before Pharaoh, that he might salute him; and it being his desire that his father's family might live apart from the Egyptians, he was not ashamed, in the midst of all his grandeur, to declare to the king, that his father and brethren were shepherds, a calling which the Egyptians looked upon as the most humble that could be. By this, he gave a proof of his humility; as it was evident that he wished it to be conspicuous, that the divine measures, which had called him from an humble condition in life to his present greatness and power, had not made him forget his origin, or caused him to be ashamed to acknowledge it, even in the presence of the king and his nobles. Having obtained permission and a grant from the king, for them to dwell in the land of Goshen, they went there, and lived in plenty and prosperity. Thus the whole nation of the Jews, then comprised in seventy persons, was saved by Divine Providence, and by the prudence, industry, and good management of Joseph.

CHAP. XII.

THE BIRTH OF MOSES.

JACOB had resided about seventeen years in Egypt, enjoying all the happiness arising from being thus placed in the bosom of his family, in peace and plenty, when he began to feel the approach of death; and after giving charge to his beloved Joseph as to the place of his burial, he died, being an hundred and forty-seven years old.

Joseph lamented for the loss of his father with long and sincere grief, and punctually fulfilled all his requests; after which, he long continued to enjoy the high honours which Pharaoh had conferred upon him. At length Joseph likewise died, leaving the same injunctions with his brothers and family, that his father had done; that his bones should be interred in the land of his fathers. His body, therefore, was embalmed in Egypt, and from thence conveyed into the land of Canaan.

But many years after the death of Joseph, a

new king arose in Egypt, who was so far from having the esteem, love, and kindness for the Hebrews as his predecessor had, that he became jealous of the privileges which they enjoyed, and of their increasing multitudes: he therefore resolved to destroy them. To this end, he employed them in the hardest labour, that of making bricks and mortar; but, finding this did not affect them in the manner he had expected, he issued the cruel order, that every male child of the Hebrews should be destroyed.

But those to whom this command was given, being merciful and fearing God, who, they well knew, would punish such wickedness, saved the helpless children, even though they knew how highly the king would be offended when it was discovered. And so it proved; for, provoked beyond endurance when he perceived his order was disobeyed, he immediately commanded all his subjects to cast the male children of these people into the river, without delay.

Whilst the Israelites were suffering under this unjust and severe persecution, a son was born to a woman named Jochabad, who was so lovely a creature, that his mother, moved both by maternal affection and the extreme beauty of the infant, contrived to conceal him for three months. But, as Pharaoh's orders were most severely executed, she was forced at length to

expose her son, for fear of losing her own life. In this distress, her tenderness suggested to her a stratagem, to endeavour to save the life of her beloved and devoted child. To this end, she made a cradle of flags, and daubed it over with pitch, to prevent its sinking. She then put the child into it, and hid it amongst the flags which grew by the river side; charging his sister to watch, and see what would become of her brother.

The child was thus placed about the time that Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river for her amusement, accompanied by her maids; when, observing the cradle amongst the flags, she sent one of her attendants to bring it to her. As soon as she cast her eyes upon the lovely infant, she was moved with pity for it. The beauty and smiling innocence of the charming child, increased the affection and interest she had felt for its unhappy situation; and she determined to save it from the dreadful fate to which it had been doomed.

His sister, who, in the mean time, had anxiously watched the termination of this event, now came forward, and entreated the princess to permit her to procure her an Hebrew nurse for the child which she had thus adopted. The princess having willingly consented, the overjoyed sister ran immediately to her anxious mo-

ther, to communicate the glad tidings, and to bring her to the princess, as the nurse to her own beloved child. On being brought into the presence of Pharaoh's daughter, her own son was again restored to her arms; and she likewise was promised a liberal reward from this humane princess, for her care and attention to him. Thus the delighted mother returned home with unspeakable joy, blessing and praising God for his protection of her infant, and for the success which her plan had met with.

As soon as he was sufficiently grown, to be separated from his nurse, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter, who was delighted with his appearance, and who liberally rewarded his mother for the care she had taken of him. She now adopted him as her own son, and called his name Moses, because he had been drawn up out of the water; *moi*, in the Egyptian language, signifying water.

CHAP. XIII.**OF THE DELIVERANCE OF THE ISRAELITES FROM
THE EGYPTIAN CAPTIVITY, BY MOSES.**

MOSES's life having been preserved in this wonderful manner, he grew up, and was educated in all the knowledge of the Egyptians, who were, at that time, the most enlightened people in the world; and he enjoyed all the luxuries and splendour of Pharaoh's court. But the knowledge of the afflictions which the Hebrews suffered, to which people he was aware that he belonged, distressed him so much, that all the prosperity which he himself enjoyed, could not banish the remembrance of their afflictions and oppressions from his mind; so that he was constantly meditating in what manner he could contribute towards the mitigation of their troubles.

The active part he took in these affairs, and some circumstances in which he had decidedly shown his great partiality to his own people,

did not escape observation; and some ungrateful expressions from an Hebrew, when quarrelling with a companion, and whom Moses strove to reconcile, together with the reflections which the Hebrew made on the interference of Moses, convinced him, that he was already looked upon with an eye of suspicion by the Egyptians. He was, therefore, fearful of incurring the anger of Pharaoh, should any injurious report against him reach his ear; so he resolved to abscond, till the threatening storm should blow over. He accordingly retreated into the land of Midian, where faint, friendless, and weary, he was resting himself near a well, when seven daughters of the priest of Midian came thither to water their father's flock. Some shepherds, who were there before them, drove them rudely away; but Moses, who could not bear to witness such an unmanly action, assisted them, and watered their flocks. The maidens, most thankful for this kindness, immediately acquainted their father with it; on which, he requested to see the Egyptian who had been so charitable, and bade them call him, to eat bread. Moses, pleased by this attention and the goodness of the old man, was contented to fix his abode with him. He married one of his daughters, and undertook the care of the flocks of his father-in-law for many years..

The thoughts, however, of the captivity in Egypt, of his brethren the Hebrews, was never absent from his mind; when, at length, a miraculous visitation which appeared to him in a burning bush, from which the voice of God commanded him to undertake the deliverance of the Israelites, left him without any further scruple; and he boldly set out on his return to Egypt, accompanied by his wife and children, to demand his countrymen's liberation from Pharaoh. This was an enterprise full of peril; yet his faith in the assistance of God, and his own ardent desire to execute it, occasioned him to undertake it with resolution and firmness.

But, great as he had imagined the difficulty of persuading Pharaoh to consent to the departure of these people out of his dominions, he found it much more so than he could have foreseen. This obstinate monarch permitted his land to be tormented by ten dreadful plagues, each of which was almost intolerable, before he would permit them to go away. The particular distresses which Egypt suffered, in consequence of Pharaoh's hardness of heart, may be read in the fifth chapter of Exodus.

The last of the dreadful calamities which it pleased God to punish these people with, being the death of all the first-born of every person within the kingdom, a universal horror seized

on all ranks of people; nothing was heard but cries and lamentations, and the horror of still greater affliction falling upon them. Pharaoh, who till then had resisted the command of God, was the first to entreat the Israelites to be gone, without delay or restriction, with their flocks and their herds, and all that they had; the only thing which he required, being, that they should haste away, in which he was joined by all the Egyptians.

Thus they were at last delivered from their long bondage in Egypt, where they had continued two hundred and fifteen years.

Pharaoh, seeing that the children of Israel had thus escaped him, and that the three days which they had demanded, to go and sacrifice in the wilderness, were already expired, and that there appeared no likelihood of their return; forgetting all the dreadful judgments with which God had punished his former great obstinacy and hardness of heart, resolved immediately to pursue them, and compel them to come back.

The Israelites seeing themselves in this extreme danger, in the midst of a desert, with the raging sea before them, and Pharaoh's army behind them, were so terrified at their desperate situation, that they likewise forgot their late miraculous deliverance, and gave themselves

up to despair and murmurings, reproaching Moses, and demanding of him, whether it was for lack of graves in Egypt, that he brought them into the wilderness to find them there.

Moses endeavoured to encourage them in this extremity, by assuring them of God's assistance. And as Pharaoh and his army now rapidly approached them, God commanded Moses to stretch forth his hand over the sea; upon which, the waters instantly divided, and opened a way for these persecuted people to pass through: thus, therefore, they marched along that miraculous way, the waters standing on each side like a wall, securing and guiding their passage through it.

The Egyptians, without being daunted or intimidated by this stupendous miracle, and supposing, since it favoured the escape of the Israelites, it might also befriend their pursuit, boldly entered upon this new and wonderful road. But they were soon sensible of their presumption; for God struck them with terror and dismay, when, seeing their error too late, they called upon one another to get out of the sea as fast as they could, before they were overwhelmed, as now they were convinced that the Lord fought against them, in favour of the Hebrews.

Whilst they were thus endeavouring to es-

cape, God commanded Moses again to stretch forth his hand over the sea, when the divided waters again joined; the Egyptians were all destroyed by it, and were soon seen floating on the sea, not so much as one escaping that fatal wreck.

Thus did the Lord rescue his chosen people from the king of Egypt and his army. This signal protection created an awful reverence in them, not only to God himself, but to his faithful servant Moses also, their happy guide, by whose hand their merciful God had wrought so many wonders for their deliverance and safety.

CHAP. XIV.

MIRACLES IN THE WILDERNESS.

THE passage through the Red Sea having filled the most insensible of the Jews with admiration and gratitude, they all joined with Moses in prayers and songs of thankfulness to God, for his mercies to them. But soon after this glorious deliverance, being pressed with hunger in

the wilderness, they began again to murmur against Moses, whom they looked upon as the cause of all the dangers and difficulties they encountered. This faithful minister of the Lord having represented to them, that the discontent and impatience which they expressed, reflected rather on God, than on himself, who was only an instrument in the hand of God to manifest his power, promised them, however, that God would attend to their wants, and give them meat. Accordingly, that same evening the Lord sent a prodigious flight of quails, which covered the camp; and the next morning, he gave them manna from heaven, which, like dew, covered all the ground round about their tents.

The Jews were surprised the next morning to see this divine food spread over the face of the earth; and wondering what it might be, Moses informed them, that it was the bread which God had sent them from heaven; and he charged them to gather it every morning before sun rising, or it would melt away, so as not to be found; and he also commanded them, that, for the more strict observance of the sabbath day, they should gather the day before a double quantity of manna, which would, on that day, though on no other day of the week, keep free from worms and putrefaction. And this heavenly bread God ever after continued to

them, during their forty years' journeying through the wilderness.

The water gushing out of the rock.

It might have been supposed, that after such a succession of miracles as the Israelites had witnessed, they never more would have doubted of the divine providence which continually watched over them. Yet a new difficulty arising from the want of water, effaced the remembrance of all the miraculous assistance they had experienced, and induced them again to murmur against Moses. For being come to a place called Rephidim, where there was no water, they, in a rebellious manner, addressed Moses, and demanded why he had brought them out of the land of Egypt, to cause them to die of thirst in the wilderness.

In this, as in all other extremities, Moses had no other resource than to solicit the assistance of God, by ardent and sincere prayers; and God, to comfort him in this distress, ordered him to go, with his rod in his hand, and accompanied by the elders of Israel, to the rock of Horeb, where he would give another proof of his almighty power, by making the water gush forth from the solid rock, to satisfy the thirst of that vast multitude.

The promise of God was immediately ful-

filled; for Moses had no sooner smote the rock, than torrents of water ran down upon the parched earth, and rivers flowed from its flinty side, by which miracle the people were relieved from their dreadful calamity, and again believed in the great goodness of God, and confided in their leader and counsellor, Moses.

The Ten Commandments.

A short time after God had thus delivered his people from the tyranny of Pharaoh, they pitched their tents in the wilderness of Sinai, before the mount, from which God signalized his intention to Moses, to make a covenant with his people, and ordered him thus to speak to them: "Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure to me, above all people, for all the earth is mine; and ye shall be unto me as a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation."

Moses having communicated this to the people, they answered with one accord, that whatsoever the Lord commanded them, that would they do.

When Moses had delivered the answer of the people, God commanded him to order them.

to sanctify themselves, and to be in readiness on the third day, when he would come down and speak to them from the top of mount Sinai. He also commanded Moses to set bounds round the mount, and to strictly forbid the people to pass beyond those bounds, upon pain of death.

All being prepared according to the command of God, upon the third day, early in the morning, tremendous claps of thunder were heard, the heavens appeared all on flame with lightning, and a thick cloud covered the top of the mount: there was also heard the sound of a trumpet exceeding loud. The people were so filled with fear and surprise on beholding and hearing these amazing objects, that Moses could scarcely persuade them to come out of their tents, to hear the commandments which God was about to give them. At the same time, God called Moses to him from the top of the mountain, which seemed all on fire, and the smoke whereof ascended like the smoke of a furnace. But the people stood afar off, and heard the ten commandments, which God spake by his own mouth. Being terrified by the awful things which they had witnessed, the people desired Moses to speak to them, and tell them, from God, what he should be pleased to command them; that so they might be relieved

from those terrors, which they apprehended would be the cause of their death.

In this manner were the ten commandments at first delivered to man, though afterwards they were written upon tables of stone, by the finger of God, and delivered to Moses upon mount Sinai. They are the same holy laws, which, even to this day, Christians look up to and preserve, as the foundation of justice and piety. And some pious writers have wished, that part of that terror which fell upon the Jews, on hearing them pronounced by God on mount Sinai, might also descend to us; to the end, that we should, in like manner, tremble at the apprehension of ever, in the least, offending against those holy ordinances, the exact observance of which, render mankind just, honourable, and happy.

Thus Moses continued to govern the children of Israel, in spite of their obstinacy and hardness of heart, and to lead them in safety through all the perils of their situation; and numerous were the miracles which it was the pleasure of the Almighty to manifest to them, during their progress through the wilderness, to convince them of his power and glory, and also of his care and protection of them. But at length, Moses, finding the period of his existence drawing to a close, and well knowing, from the com-

mand of God, that he was never to pass over the river Jordan, he sent for Joshua, who had long been in attendance on him, and gave to him the charge of that favoured people, according to the order of the Lord. In most pathetic terms he exhorted him to be strong and of good courage, in leading the people into the land which the Lord had promised them as an inheritance for ever: he also declared to the people what God had ordered him to command them in his name, and which he afterwards wrote in a book; and this book was put in the ark of the covenant, together with the tables of the law.

Finally, having fervently blessed the children of Israel, he went up to mount Nebo, where the Lord gave him a view of the land of Canaan, though he well knew he was never to enter it.

And thus this great man died on that mountain, being an hundred and twenty years old, and was secretly buried there, so that his sepulchre was never discovered. And all the people mourned for this great and good prince and prophet for thirty days; and then became obedient to Joshua, whom God filled with the spirit of wisdom. But yet there never arose in Israel so great a prophet as Moses; in whom a most incomparable meekness and sweetness of temper, was joined with a holy zeal, and both under the conduct of divine wisdom.

CHAP. XV.OF THE JUDGES OF ISRAEL WHO SUCCEEDED
MOSES.

AFTER the death of the great lawgiver Moses, Joshua, according to the word of God, took the command and guidance of the children of Israel, in their further progress to take possession of the promised land; during which period, they had numerous conflicts with the surrounding nations, over whom, by the divine blessing and protection, they always triumphed, and obtained complete victory. After the death of Joshua, they fell into much confusion, and were, for some time, governed by a wise and discreet woman, named Deborah, a prophetess, who likewise encouraged them in their pursuits of conquest, and under whom they were equally prosperous. After several others, Jephthah at length was chosen for this high office. He was a man of wonderful courage and skill in war; and having had some family disputes with his brethren, had separated himself from them, and

retired into the land of Tob, where he had a large party of men under his command. The children of Israel, finding themselves in danger of being attacked by their neighbours the Ammonites, and well knowing the valour of Jephthah, conceived no man so fit to take the charge of their affairs as he was. For this purpose, they sent to him to the land of Tob, requesting that he would be their general and leader; to which he consented, on condition that they would make him their prince, in case he succeeded in overcoming the Ammonites.

As soon as Jephthah found himself placed in this high station, he sent ambassadors to the king of Ammon, to represent to him the injustice of his conduct to the Israelites, and entreating him to alter it. But that prince turned a deaf ear to his remonstrances, being fully determined on war. Jephthah, being now convinced that no negociation could succeed, prepared himself for battle, and collected very speedily a sufficient army for his purpose. But, being over anxious for the fate of an enterprise on which depended his future fame and dignity, he made a fatal vow to God, before the engagement, that, if he would bless him with victory, he would offer up to him, for a burnt offering, whatsoever first came forth of his doors to meet him on his return.

Jephthah having utterly defeated his enemies, and obtained a complete victory, returned home in triumph. But his joy was soon turned to mourning; for, as he drew near his house, his only daughter, transported with joy for the glory which her father had acquired, came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances, and every demonstration of pleasure, which was the custom of those times.

The wretched father, who, but a few moments before, had thought himself the happiest man in existence, was now overwhelmed with the deepest sorrow; and rending his clothes, which was the most certain token of severe affliction which could be given, acquainted his devoted daughter with the dreadful vow which he had made.

Upon this unexpected and terrific explanation of his sudden sorrow, the amiable and heroic young woman, neither dismayed nor shocked at the recital, with a courage equal to that of her father, exhorted him faithfully to fulfil his vow which he had made to God; assuring him, that she should die contented and happy, since he had obtained the victory over his enemies. She only requested that she might be allowed two months to prepare herself for the fatal catastrophe, and to take leave of her young companions; after which time, she

returned to her father, "who did with her according to his vow."

No passage in the sacred pages can more fully elucidate, than the foregoing does, the extreme impropriety of rash and inconsiderate vows; which never can be necessary, and most frequently are attended with great inconvenience in the fulfilment, if not, as in this distressing case, with grievous and severe repentance. It ought, therefore, ever to be kept in remembrance, as a warning against such dangerous and vain expressions.

CHAP. XVI.

OF SAMSON AND THE PHILISTINES.

AFTER the death of Jephthah, the Scripture gives us no particular account of the succeeding judges, till Samson, whose history is very circumstantially related. Samson was of the tribe of Dan; and his birth was foretold to his mother by an angel, who, communicating the

E

joyful tidings to her husband, he became desirous of seeing the angel who had visited his wife. The angel soon after appearing again to her, she ran to her husband, to inform him of the angel's presence. Her husband immediately ran to see this prodigy; and after he had spoken to the angel, would willingly have offered sacrifice to him; but he forbade it, saying, that such homage was due to God alone.

The promised child being at length born, was called Samson, and educated according to the directions the angel had given to his mother concerning it. When he was grown up a young man, he saw one of the daughters of the Philistines, whom he desired his parents to procure him for a wife. His father was much averse to this proposal, not knowing that it was the will of God, who had purposed, by this means, to avenge the children of Israel on the Philistines, who at that time had dominion over them.

As Samson went one day with his father and mother to visit this woman, whom he intended to marry, he met a young lion by the way, which came open-mouthed and roaring against him. The spirit of the Lord then coming upon him, and giving him strength and resolution; he laid hold on the lion, and rent him with as much ease as though it had been a kid; but he told not his parents of it. Some time

afterwards, returning the same way, he stepped aside to see the lion he had killed, and was very much surprised to find that a swarm of bees had settled in the body of the lion, and had formed honey there, of which he took some and eat; and coming to his parents, he gave them some also, of which they partook, without knowing from whence it came.

Samson at last having married the Philistine woman, at the wedding feast he gave a riddle to the young men assembled as his guests, for them to explain, which was this: "Out of the eater came forth meat; and out of the strong came forth sweetness." And he told them, if they could find out the meaning of that riddle in the course of the seven days that the feast lasted, they should have, as a reward, thirty sheets and thirty changes of garments; but, if they could not, they should give him the like.

The young Philistines, finding that it was impossible for them to expound this riddle, threatened Samson's wife, that, if she did not persuade her husband to make the solution of the riddle known to her, they would destroy her and her father's house. The poor woman, terrified by these threats, which she knew they would put into execution, prevailed upon Sam-

son to confide the meaning to her, which she immediately communicated to her companions.

Samson, offended with his wife for having betrayed the secret of the riddle to the young men, not knowing the danger in which she was placed, quitted her in displeasure; but shortly after, when his anger was over, he went again to visit her, when her father refused to admit him; and said, in excuse, that, supposing that he did not love her, he had disposed of her to another.

Samson, greatly enraged at this insult, said, that whatever might happen, they only would have to blame themselves for it. By a cruel stratagem, to revenge himself on his wife's father, he contrived to set fire to all the standing corn of the Philistines, which reduced it, together with their vineyards and olive trees, to ashes. The Philistines, when they learned that this calamity was brought upon them by Samson, instead of returning it upon him, directed all their revenge against his wife and father-in-law, who were perfectly guiltless of the offence, and instantly burnt them both with fire. But Samson, watching his opportunity, not long after fell upon the Philistines, and destroyed them with a very great slaughter.

The Philistines, alarmed and distressed be-

yond measure, by the repeated violence committed by Samson, gathered together in great multitudes, and encamped in the lot of the tribe of Judah. The people being terrified at their hostile appearance, demanded the cause of their approach. The Philistines answered, "to seize upon Samson." Upon this, the men of Judah meanly delivered him into the hands of his enemies, bound with two new cords; and the Philistines gave a triumphant shout of joy, at having him thus in their power. But the spirit of the Lord coming mightily upon him, the cords that were on his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and the cords loosened from off his hands. Then taking up the jaw-bone of an ass, he slew therewith a thousand of the Philistines. The heat and violence of this miraculous action causing him to experience extreme thirst, he earnestly prayed to God for relief. God heard Samson's prayer; and immediately opening a hollow place in the jaw-bone, caused a spring of water to proceed from it. Samson then allayed his thirst with the water which sprung from the jaw-bone; his strength returned, and he was revived. It was by the wonderful strength which it pleased God to bestow on Samson, and not any aptitude in the instrument, that enabled him to obtain this victory; which will not appear surprising, when

we consider the power of God, who can raise our natural strength to whatever degree he pleases, and at the same time enfeeble the spirit of those who oppose his designs, in such a manner as to prevent their having means to help themselves; which, doubtless, was the case with the vanquished Philistines.

The Philistines, not discouraged by this wonderful manifestation of God's protection of Samson, determined to waylay him in the city of Gaza, to which place he had retired. Samson having notice of their design of entrapping him, seemed not to regard it, and slept till midnight, when he arose, and boldly going to the gates of the city, pulled up the massy doors and two side-posts, and laying them upon his shoulders, carried them to the top of a mountain, passing through the midst of those who lay in ambush to destroy him; but who, struck with amazement at his strength and courage, let him pass unmolested, afraid to encounter a man so powerful.

Thus were the hopes of the Philistines again frustrated; and they found all that they had hitherto done, turned to their own loss and confusion.

Whilst the Philistines were in this state of despair, they became a little revived by hearing that Samson was seen to visit frequently a

woman named Delilah. To this woman they offered a very large reward, if she could induce Samson to confide to her wherein his strength lay. Delilah consented to this proposal; and, with the utmost artifice, endeavoured to get the secret from him. For a length of time he evaded giving her a true and direct answer to these disagreeable enquiries; but at last, tired out by her importunities and reproaches, she prevailed on him to tell her the truth, which was, that if his head were shaved, his strength would fail him, and he should become like other men.

No sooner had Delilah obtained this important information, than she treacherously sent for the lords of the Philistines; and having lulled Samson to sleep, caused the seven locks of his head to be cut off. Delilah then awakened Samson by her usual cry, that the Philistines were upon him; and Samson arose, thinking to depart as usual, but the spirit of God was gone from him, in consequence of his own folly and negligence. The Philistines, therefore, took him captive, and brought him to Gaza, bound him with fetters of brass, put out his eyes, and made him grind in the prison-house. Such was the cruel fate of this wonderfully gifted man.

Whilst Samson was thus wretchedly employed by his enemies, in labour so hard and de-

grading, and destitute of the blessing of sight, the hair of his head again began to grow. About this time, the lords of the Philistines made a solemn sacrifice to Dagon, their god, for having delivered Samson into their hands; and when it was concluded, and they were about to make merry, they sent for Samson, that they might make sport of his miseries. For this purpose, they placed him between the pillars upon which the house stood, where his figure would be most conspicuous to the assembly.

Samson, touched to the heart by the insolent treatment he received, and by the sorrows, drudgery, and humiliation he had suffered, could, with difficulty, restrain his indignation; but trusting in God's mercy and assistance, he desired the lad that held him by the hand, to lead him close to the pillars, that he might rest himself against them. As soon as he came to the place, he earnestly prayed unto the Lord God, to give him strength only this time, that he might at once be avenged of the Philistines for his two eyes; and laying hold on the pillars with both his hands, and shaking them with all his might, the house fell, crushing him and all the lords of the Philistines, with about three thousand more of them that were therein and on the roof of the house; so that "he slew

more at his death than he had done in all his life." And thus ended the life of Samson, who was the strongest man.

CHAP. XVII.

RUTH AND NAOMI.

THE history of Ruth is of such consideration in the genealogy of the Scripture connexion of families, that it has pleased the Divine Wisdom to have it recorded by itself.

In the time when the judges ruled Israel, there happened a great famine in Judea, which obliged a man of the name of Elimelech, with his wife and two sons, to go and sojourn in the land of Moab. But Elimelech dying soon after their arrival there, Naomi was left a widow, with her two sons. Each of these sons, however, took a wife in the land of Moab; and the name of her who married the youngest son was Ruth. Ten years after, the two sons of Naomi died also. Naomi, seeing herself thus bereft of

her husband and children, told her daughters-in-law, that she was now resolved to return into her native country, as she had heard that God had visited it with plenty; but she desired them to continue in their own country, where it was most likely they would be more happy.

But her daughters-in-law, unwilling to separate themselves from her, told her they were resolved to return with her into Judea. Whereupon Naomi represented to them her destitute condition, in the strongest terms; and added, how greatly it would increase her sorrow and distress, to see them, for her sake, abandon their friends, their country, and every future hope of wealth or comfort. Still, however, "they went on their way, to return to the land of Judah." At length, overpowered by the persuasive arguments of Naomi, Orpah, her eldest son's widow, with great reluctance and grief, consented to return back to her own people, and took an affectionate farewell of her mother-in-law.

But Orpah's departure served only to make Ruth's love and constancy the more firm and conspicuous; for, notwithstanding all the pressing solicitations of Naomi, she would by no means be prevailed on to leave her, but replied to her persuasions in these terms: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following

after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

Naomi, perceiving the fixed constancy of Ruth, urged her no further against her purpose, but suffered her to come with her to Bethlehem, the place of her birth, where they arrived in the beginning of barley harvest; and being in great distress, and pressed by necessity to seek for some relief, Ruth solicited her mother-in-law to give her leave to go into the fields to glean. Having obtained her permission, she happened to go into the part of a field which belonged to Boaz, the kinsman of Elimelech, the husband of Naomi.

Boaz soon after came from Bethlehem to visit his reapers, and demanded of them, who the young woman was that gleaned after them. They told him whose daughter she was, and gave her a most excellent character. Upon hearing this, he expressed himself with much kindness towards her, and charged her not to go and glean in any other field, but to keep with his maidens, and to eat and drink freely of whatever was provided; ordering the reapers

also, to drop ears of corn on purpose for her, and not to reprove her for taking them.

Naomi being informed by Ruth of the kindness and generosity of Boaz, was greatly rejoiced thereat; and she began to consider in what manner she might best improve his clemency, to the further advantage of her beloved daughter. To this end, she acquainted Ruth that Boaz was her near kinsman; and, understanding that he was to remain that night in his threshing-floor, she advised her to repair thither, and that, when he lay down to rest, that she should, unobserved by him or any other, place herself at his feet, and she would give her instructions what she should further do.

Ruth, in obedience to her mother's commands, repaired to the threshing-floor, and being favoured by the darkness of the night, came, unperceived by any, and laid herself down at the feet of Boaz. Awakening in the night, Boaz was surprised to find a person there, and hastily demanded who it was. Ruth having made herself known to him, informed him that he was a near kinsman, and that she solicited his protection and assistance, according to the order of the law.

Boaz, who was then an hundred years old, greatly commended the prudence of her conduct, and expressed the regard he had for her,

on account of the modesty and propriety of her behaviour, from the first of his seeing her; adding, that for all these virtues he would willingly become her husband; but, that there was another kinsman, nearer allied to her than he was, who must be first consulted, to know whether he would declare himself willing to perform the duty of a kinsman towards her.

Accordingly, the next day Boaz went to the gate of the city, and having sat down with the magistrates and elders, who met there to do justice to the people, he saw the kinsman of whom he had spoken to Ruth passing by; and having called to him, told him, in the presence of ten of the elders of the city, that Naomi intended to sell a parcel of her late husband's land, which he thought it fit he should be acquainted with, that, in case that he should refuse to purchase it, he might then be at liberty to buy it for himself.

The kinsman answered, that he was very willing to buy it; but Boaz further informing him, that whoever bought the land, must at the same time marry Ruth, he immediately declined the proposal, and transferred his right to Boaz.

Then Boaz said to the elders and the people of the city, you are witnesses this day, that I have bought the estate of Elimelech, and also of my taking Ruth to be my wife. This

noble action caused the elders and all the people to commend him for the goodness of his heart, in befriending these helpless and distressed women, and they wished him all the happiness he so well deserved.

Thus was this happy marriage concluded, which God soon after blessed with the birth of Obed, who was the grandfather of king David. On this joyful occasion, all the friends and neighbours of Naomi came to congratulate her; assuring her that she was more blessed in such a daughter as Ruth, than if she had been the mother of seven sons. Naomi herself being likewise sensible of the happiness she now enjoyed, gave her sincere thanks to God for all his mercies; and, in an ecstasy of pleasure, received her little grandson, and laid him in her bosom, and nourished him.

This beautiful and interesting story of Ruth and Naomi affords a fine moral lesson, well worthy the consideration of youth. The attachment of Ruth to her mother-in-law, in determining to share her fate, whatever it might prove to be, is an admirable instance of affection. Her patient submission to one of the meanest employments, (gleaning in the field,) for the

relief of their mutual distress, gives proof of her industry, and her anxious wish to contribute all in her power to render their situation more comfortable; and her subsequent correct behaviour, her gentleness and modesty, attracted the attention of Boaz, and caused him to make enquiries concerning her, which were answered so much to her advantage. Finally, her obedience to the instructions of Naomi, in the observance of customs to which she was a stranger, led to the happy conclusion of her being united to so good and rich a man as Boaz; by which means, she became the great grandmother of David, the most renowned king that Israel ever had, and from whom descended our blessed Saviour, Jesus Christ.

CHAP. XVIII.

OF SAUL AND SAMUEL.

AFTER these events, many judges and governors ruled the children of Israel; but, as the people were principally engaged in wars with the sur-

rounding nations, few circumstances connected with these exploits could be introduced into so small a work as this, so as to be rendered instructive to the youthful reader. Many events are therefore passed over, (which he will find at length in his Bible,) and the narrative is resumed at the period when Samuel had the command over the children of Israel. Under Samuel's guidance, so great a revolution took place in the form of their government, that it will be necessary to select such passages as will give a sufficient account of the manner in which it was brought about, and of its succeeding consequences.

Samuel was a holy prophet, who, animated by the spirit of God, preached to all Israel, fervently recommending to them repentance for their sins, with future amendment of conduct, which would procure for them the protection and blessing of God, and the overthrow of all their enemies. To this admonition the people paid obedience; but, as Samuel was advancing in years, and his sons had greatly degenerated from the godliness and wisdom of their father, the people began to be solicitous concerning a successor, and nothing appeared so desirable in their eyes, as to "have a king to rule over them." And they took the first opportunity of acquainting Samuel with their wish, which was,

“that they might be governed like other nations.”

Samuel was exceedingly surprised and troubled at this unexpected demand; and immediately, in his private devotions to God, complained of it as an insult offered to him. But God comforted him, and commanded him to comply with their inclinations, though, at the same time, to set plainly before their eyes the oppression and tyranny it was in the power of a bad king to exercise over them; and that, by this inclination, they rejected having God for their king, as heretofore. But no argument which Samuel could make use of, was sufficient to alter their fixed resolution to have a king, let the event be what it might.

It so happened, just at this time, that Kish, (who was the father of Saul,) having lost some of his asses, sent his son Saul, attended by one of his servants, to seek them. Having wandered about for some time, vainly endeavouring to find them, and at length despairing of success, they resolved to return back. But the servant, recollecting that there was a man of God (that is, a prophet) near the place where they then were, persuaded Saul to go and consult him, thinking it was possible he could direct him where to find the asses, after which they had already had so tedious a search.

Saul, guided by this advice, proceeded to the city before them, to enquire for the prophet. They had no sooner entered the place, than they were met by Samuel, the Lord having communicated to him, that he should at that time meet the man whom he had fixed upon for him to anoint as king over his people, he being the person whom the Lord had designed to be their deliverer from the oppression of the Philistines.

As soon as Samuel saw Saul, being assured, by the revelation of God, that he was the man, he invited him to dine with him, and said, that he must stay all night; and he desired him not to be concerned about his father's asses, as they were already found. Saul gladly accepted the kind invitation, and was entertained by Samuel with all manner of honour and respect, after which they retired to rest. At break of day Samuel called up his visitor; and having accompanied him through the city, he bade Saul command his servant to pass on before, for he had something from God to communicate to him.

As soon as the servant was departed, and Saul and Samuel were by themselves, he took a vial of oil, and poured it upon the head of Saul, kissed him, and told him, he was anointed by order of the Lord, who had chosen him to be

king over his people Israel. As a proof of his authority, he told him that, on his way home, near Rachel's sepulchre, he should be informed that the asses were found, and that his father's trouble was now only concerning his son.

Saul concealed what had taken place even from his father; but it was the will of God that it should be manifest, and, accordingly, Samuel called the people together, to cast lots, that they might know whom God had appointed to the dignity of being their king. When this was done, the lot fell upon the tribe of Benjamin, and, in that tribe, on Saul, the son of Kish. Saul had absented himself from this meeting, from motives of modesty; but he was brought forth, and Samuel showed him to the people, informing them, that God had selected him to be their king, and that they might observe that he was the comeliest and tallest person amongst them.

Saul being thus established king, immediately engaged in the wars with the Philistines, which so continually employed the people of Israel. In one of these encounters, Jonathan, the son of Saul, a noble and good man, took a most heroic resolution, founded on his strong faith and confidence in God; and calling for his armour-bearer, communicated to him his design, which was, singly to attack the enemy, assured,

he said, that it was as easy to the Lord to deliver by few as by many; and that, by his assistance, a single man might be sufficient to defeat a whole army.

As soon as his armour-bearer had declared his readiness to attend him in the dangerous enterprise he meditated, they both climbed up a high rock; and though they were discovered in this situation by the enemy, yet they boldly ventured, in their sight, to crawl up another precipice upon their hands and knees, before they could come upon the out-guards of the Philistines. When they had done this, they fell upon the guards, who were about twenty in number, and destroyed them. This unexpected attack alarmed the whole camp, and, in the confusion which ensued, the cause of which they could not comprehend, they turned their arms one against another, routing and defeating themselves.

The noise of this disorder being heard by the Israelites, Saul made enquiry who was missing from amongst them; and being told that Jonathan was absent, he readily guessed what had happened, and made haste to finish a victory his son had so courageously and happily begun. And, to the end that no delay should stop the progress of his success, he cursed those

who should lose time by eating any food till evening.

The Israelites soon after came into a wood, where they found abundance of honey; and, though faint for want of food, and weary with hard pursuit, yet they durst not eat any of it, for fear of the king's curse. But Jonathan knew nothing of what had passed, so he dipped the end of a rod, which he had in his hand, into the honeycomb, and he had no sooner tasted the honey, than he found himself wonderfully refreshed.

In the evening, after they had rested and refreshed themselves, Saul was anxious again to attack the Philistines; but taking counsel of God concerning it, and receiving no answer, he conceived that some one of his army had offended God, and he swore that whomsoever it proved to be, even were it Jonathan himself, he should surely die. Lots, therefore, were cast, to discover it, and Jonathan was taken.

Saul, seeing his son taken by the lot, demanded of him what he had done. Jonathan answered, he had only tasted a little honey, and expressed his surprise that, for so trifling an offence, he should be condemned to die. But Saul, with a strange and unnatural firmness, persisted that his son should die for this offence. But "the people said unto Saul, shall Jonathan

die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not."

Josephus, the Jewish historian, introduces Jonathan making an answer to his father on this occasion, not unlike Jephthah's daughter, under nearly similar circumstances: "That shall be welcome to me," replied Jonathan, "which acquits my father of the obligation of a religious vow; and only befalls me, in consequence of so glorious a victory to him who gave me being. I have lived long enough, since I have lived to see the intolerable pride and most daring insolence of the Philistines brought down by the Hebrews, which will serve me for a consolation in all my other sufferings." And this historian tells us further, that the whole multitude was so exceedingly charmed with the piety and bravery of this amiable young man, that, in an ecstasy of tenderness and compassion, they took him away out of the hands of his so highly incensed father.

CHAP. XIX.

OF SAUL, JONATHAN, AND DAVID.

SAUL, not continuing to regulate his conduct according to the will of God, was rejected by him; and he made choice of another to govern his people, instead of Saul. For this purpose, he sent Samuel to anoint the person whom he had chosen; telling him, to take a heifer with him, and go to Bethlehem to offer sacrifice; and that, when there, he should call Jesse to the ceremony, one of whose sons he had determined upon to be king over Israel.

Samuel, in obedience to the command he had received, being come to Bethlehem, invited Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice, and afterwards to feast with him. Jesse and his sons, in consequence, appearing at the feast, Samuel looked upon them, one by one, anxious to discover which it was whom God intended to honour; and observing Eliab, the eldest of the sons of Jesse, who was a tall and comely person,

and of great symmetry of proportion, he concluded within himself that he was the man; but God gave no confirming testimony of his having decided right. At last, when amongst the seven sons of Jesse then present, he perceived not the one he was to anoint, he then demanded of Jesse whether these were all the children he had. Jesse told him he had one more, the youngest of them all, who kept his sheep in the field. Samuel bade him immediately send for him; "for," said he, "we will not sit down till he come hither."

As soon as David (which was the name of Jesse's youngest child) was come, the Lord said to Samuel, "Arise, anoint him, for this is the man." Whereupon he took a horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren; and, from that time forward, the spirit of the Lord came upon David, and departed from Saul. This unhappy prince, being thus abandoned by the spirit of God, was immediately seized by an evil spirit, who cast him into furious transports. This sad change proved the beginning of David's elevation; for Saul, being tormented with the grievous agitation of the evil spirit, his courtiers and officers advised him to look out for a man who was skilful in playing upon the harp, that the evil spirit, being forced to retire at the melodious sweetness of the harmony, he

might be refreshed, and relieved from his persecution. Enquiry being made for a person so qualified, none was found so expert in that art as David, a youth of so beautiful an aspect, that, as soon as Saul saw him, and felt the powerful effects of his charming skill in driving away the evil spirit that tormented him, he conceived a great love for him, and bestowed on him the honour of being his armour-bearer.

Some time after this event had taken place, another war broke out between the Israelites and the Philistines, when both armies lying encamped near each other, Goliath, a Philistine of monstrous size and excessive arrogance and vanity, insulted and triumphed over the Israelites for forty days successively. He came forth from his camp, and challenged the best man they had to fight with him; saying, that it was better thus to decide their quarrel by single combat, than to hazard the lives of so many men in battle. But his enormous bulk was so terrific, his arms and warlike accoutrements so direful, that the hardiest of the whole army of Israel durst not enter the lists with him.

Just at this time, Jesse had sent his son David to his three brothers, that were in Saul's army, to carry them some provisions. As soon as he was come into the camp, he saw this proud

giant, and heard his haughty defiance; and feeling himself powerfully stimulated, both for the glory of God and the honour of his country, demanded of those he met with, what would be the reward of him who should fight with and destroy that profane boasting Philistine, who had dared to defy the armies of the living God. He was answered, that Saul, besides the royal presents and immunities he would bestow upon the victor, would also give him his daughter to wife.

But Eliab, his brother, overhearing this conversation, was offended at it, and accused David of vanity; and he bid him go and look after his sheep, which he had left exposed to the numerous beasts of the wilderness, only to please his vain curiosity, in coming to see the battle. David feeling, however, in his own heart, that very different motives influenced him, than those to which his brother had attributed his conduct, made a gentle reply to his reproof; and then declared, openly, that he was ready to encounter that proud Philistine, and trusted in God for his success.

As David was expressing himself in these heroic terms, he drew upon himself the attention of several of the army, who immediately brought him before Saul. Observing the youth and slight form of David, Saul could not think

of his hazarding his life in such an unequal combat, and under such insuperable disadvantages. But David told him, that he had already killed a lion and a bear, which came to devour his sheep; and that he could not doubt, but that the great and glorious God, who had protected him in those perils from the mouth of the lion and the paws of the bear, would also deliver him out of the hand of the savage Philistine.

Saul, overcome by the force of David's arguments, consented to let him undertake the combat; and for that purpose girded on him his own sword, and put his armour upon him. But David, finding himself encumbered with arms, to the use of which he was a stranger, hastily resigned them, and betook himself to his accustomed weapons of defence, a staff and a sling. Goliath, seeing him approach so strangely equipped for battle, was greatly enraged at it, and said, that David must take him for a dog, to come against him with staff and sling; and he threatened, that he would give his flesh to the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. But David boldly answering in the name of God, ran to meet him, and putting a stone, which he had selected for the occasion, into the sling, he struck the Philistine directly in the

forehead. Goliath falling with his face to the ground, David ran and stood upon him: he then cut off his head with his own sword. The Philistines, terrified at the death of their champion, fled in the utmost dismay; and the Israelites pursuing, gave them a great overthrow, and then spoiled their tents.

CHAP. XX.

OF SAUL, JONATHAN, AND DAVID, CONTINUED.

THE joy and surprise of the Israelites at the defeat of Goliath were such, that they could not sufficiently estimate either the danger from which they saw themselves delivered, nor the courage of him who had been the glorious instrument of it. King Saul, in particular, enquired who this wonderful youth was, and to what family in Israel his father belonged.

Jonathan, the son of Saul, who was himself a most noble commander, and who had also performed many brave exploits against the Philis-
was so far from envying this extraordinary

young man, that "he loved him as his own soul;" and, as a mark of the highest esteem he could bestow, he stripped himself of his own robe, arms, and ornaments, to put them upon David, his dearest friend.

Neither were the people deficient in expressing the veneration they had for David; for, as he returned after the defeat of Goliath, the women of Israel came out in multitudes to meet him, and honour his victory with singing and dancing, and every demonstration of joy. But this, though only a just tribute to the wonderful act which he had achieved, was the cause from which sprung numerous troubles and persecutions to him in future; for the women, in their songs of joy, declared that "Saul had killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands." This observation so greatly irritated the haughty prince, who conceived himself insulted by the comparison, that envy and jealousy immediately entered his heart; and instead of imitating the generous conduct of the noble Jonathan, he abandoned himself to anger and revenge. Ever afterwards he looked upon David with extreme hatred, though, till this fatal moment, he had regarded him with affection. He complained loudly of the bold impertinence of his subjects, in ascribing more to David than to him; and the trouble and disorder of mind this passion

hurried him into were such, as to terrify all those who witnessed it.

The direful passions of envy and revenge still continuing to hold dominion over this unhappy prince, (for every person must be deemed unhappy, who gives way to the influence of violent passions,) he was continually thinking by what means he might get rid of a person who was become so hateful to him. But David, who was perfectly aware of the many snares which were laid to entrap him, and above all, being protected by God, was always upon his guard, and by prudent precaution always evaded the king's malicious designs; to which caution, he added the most submissive and respectful behaviour. But vain was every endeavour to soothe the angry monarch—to conciliate or tranquillize his temper: his malice still continued as inveterate as ever. David, therefore, after Saul had made several attempts against his life, thought it would be best for him to make his escape from the dangers which surrounded him, whilst it was yet in his power.

The strict and inviolable friendship which had ever subsisted between Jonathan and David, caused the latter to conceal neither his apprehensions nor his intentions from his most confidential friend. Nor could Jonathan witness, without the most severe grief, the perse-

vering malice of the king towards the unoffending David. He, therefore, could not blame David for the plan he had formed of absenting himself, which prudence suggested; and he was not without hope, that time and David's absence might soften and reconcile Saul to him, and inspire his heart with milder sentiments. For this reason he acquiesced with David's opinion; and only advised him not to quit the court entirely, till he had had an opportunity of conversing with his father respecting him, and acquainting him with the result of their conference.

Upon this, David reminded Jonathan of the difficulty which would attend on their seeing each other again, if the king should still continue to be his enemy, as he must be in concealment during the proposed interview. Jonathan then settled the plan by which the whole affair should be regulated; for, taking David into a field, he there advised him to absent himself from the king's table on the approaching feast of the new moon, at which time all the officers of the king used to dine with him. He said, that Saul, observing David's place empty, would not fail to enquire after him; and that he would then take the opportunity of speaking to his father on the subject, in such a manner as, he trusted, would reconcile them. Till then, how-

ever, Jonathan advised him to conceal himself in a particular spot, which he pointed out; saying, that as soon as he had sounded and discovered his father's intentions towards him, he would come into the field with his arrows and an attendant, as was his custom when he shot at a mark; and he requested David to be attentive to what he should say to the young man who would be with him, for by that he would know what success he had met with. But he desired him to keep himself cautiously concealed until he could with safety come forth; the signal for which should be, that when he shot the arrows, if he should say to the lad, "behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them;" then come forth, for there is peace for thee. But if I say unto the young man, "behold, the arrows are beyond thee;" then go thy way, for the Lord hath sent thee away.

According to Jonathan's direction, so David acted. When the feast day was come, and David appeared not in his usual situation, Saul became transported with rage at his absence, and more particularly when Jonathan began to intercede and to speak in favour of his beloved friend. His father then reproached him with vehemence for his attachment, which, he told him, was against the interest of them both; and he became so exasperated, that, had not his

son Jonathan escaped from his presence, he would certainly have killed him.

In the deepest affliction, Jonathan then pursued his way to the field, where David still waited in expectation of his return; and he shot the arrows, as had been agreed upon between them, whereby David well understood that no good had attended on the efforts of his friend. As soon, therefore, as the lad had departed with the arrows, David came forth; and being fully informed of all that had taken place, he found that flight was now all that remained to secure his life. These affectionate friends, therefore, separated, after declaring, in the most solemn manner, that a perpetual amity should subsist between them, and that no circumstance whatever should ever alter their attachment. The prince returned, with a heavy heart, to his father's court; and David, now forlorn and desolate, was at a loss where to direct his steps for safety. At length, to secure himself more effectually against the fury of Saul, he determined to put himself under the protection of Achish, king of Gath, who received him very kindly. But when it began to be rumoured who he was, the fame of the actions which he had achieved would probably have proved fatal to him, had he not been aware of the danger

he was in, and, by a successful stratagem, escaped it.

The life David was forced to lead, after Saul had thus declared himself his enemy, was very wretched and forlorn. He was obliged to flee from mountain to mountain, and from one cave to another, to hide himself, finding every where those who were ready to betray him. But still he also found many ready to assist and join him; so that, at length, he had a party of men about him, which amounted to six hundred. The great difficulty, however, which he experienced, in supplying the necessities of these adherents to his cause, added much to his perplexity.

Saul, in the mean time hearing that David had a number of followers, raised the forces of his kingdom, to go against him in the wilderness of Ziph, and with the intention of taking him, having been informed that David had secreted himself there.

But the spies of David being on the alert, brought him word that Saul was himself in the camp; upon which intelligence, he went and took a view of the army, and marked the place where the tent of Saul, and of Abner, his chief captain, were placed. Then taking Abishai with him, they came into the camp, and found Abner his general, and all his officers and



soldiers, in a profound sleep, as if, being in pursuit of an enemy, they had nothing to fear.

Abishai, seeing so favourable an opportunity for David to get rid at once of all his trouble, and set the crown upon his own head, earnestly entreated him to give him leave to kill Saul, whom, he said, God had so providentially delivered into his hands. But David, respecting the anointed of the Lord, (the king appointed by God to rule the people of Israel,) would not suffer Abishai to touch him, but contented himself with taking his spear only from his side, and the cruse of water which was standing at the head of his bed. Having done this, David got on an eminence not far off, and called aloud to Abner, reproaching him and the whole army for their negligence, in not keeping a better guard over the king; and telling them, that they deserved death for their carelessness: at the same time, he showed them the king's spear. Saul, awakening with the noise, hearing David's voice, and understanding what had taken place, was struck with compunction for his cruel behaviour towards one who had acted so nobly by him when so entirely in his power. And he said, "Is that thy voice, my son David?" David answered, that it was; and, with the greatest respect and submission, entreated to know what he had done to offend him, and

why he thus pursued his most faithful servant. Saul answered, "I have sinned: return, my son David, for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day." David then desired that Saul would send one of his young men to fetch the spear, when Saul again blessed and praised him for his generous conduct; after which, with the kindest assurances of mutual faith and regard, "David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place." And thus, once more, they separated in peace and good will.

CHAP. XXI.

THE DEFEAT AND DEATH OF SAUL AND JONATHAN.

Not long after this memorable reconciliation, which, however, it appears, David did not consider so sufficiently permanent or sincere as to make it safe for him to return to the court, the Philistines, the old enemies of Israel, again began to arrange themselves and prepare to

attack them. The unhappy king Saul, being at this time forsaken by the spirit of God, which was accustomed to sustain him in times of danger, became depressed in mind, and apparently deprived of that courage and resolution with which he had hitherto ever been inspired. Contrary to his natural feelings, he was now seized with fear and trembling at the preparations and approach of the Philistines; a presaging apprehension having taken possession of his heart, that, in the approaching engagement, he should be defeated. Under these impressions, he brought into the field a heart oppressed with an assurance of being overcome. And so it proved; for his troops were routed, his sons killed, (amongst whom was the noble Jonathan,) and he expected every moment to be overtaken by the enemy and slain. In this extremity, Saul desired his armour-bearer to kill him, but he refused to do it; so he fell upon his own sword. The faithful servant, seeing the fate of his master, and being overcome with despair, followed the example set by the king, and fell upon his sword also. This was the end of that great, though unhappy prince, and of his valiant sons.

Nothing could exceed the grief of David, when informed of the death of the king, and of his highly esteemed friend, Jonathan, whom he loved with the affection of a brother; for, with-

out regarding the good that was likely to result to him by the death of Saul, and the fatigues and dangers it would free him from, he mourned, with unfeigned sorrow, the death of Saul and Jonathan, and composed an elegy, or song of lamentation for them, the pathetic beauty of which must ever be admired, when read in the sacred volume which contains it.

After the death of Saul, David, having first asked counsel of God, returned to Judea, where the tribe of Judah proclaimed and anointed him king in Hebron, when he was about thirty years of age. Abner, Saul's general, in the mean time set up Ishbosheth, one of the sons of Saul, to be king over the other tribes. But five years after, this prince was cruelly murdered by assassins, in consequence of which, David entered into the peaceable possession of all the kingdom of Israel.

David was now arrived at that enviable dignity which appears so alluring to all eyes, and where, it might be imagined, that all his sorrows and dangers would terminate. But he had yet to experience, in his own person, what he had so frequently seen in the reign of his predecessor, Saul; that neither rank, dignity, nor riches, can exempt the possessor from sorrow or misfortune; and that it generally happens, that the most humble and obscure situations in

society, are the most happy and free from anxiety. This truth is fully exemplified in the history of this great king, who, partly from his own transgressions, whereby he offended God, who punished him accordingly, and partly from the turbulence of the people over whom he reigned, appears to have been almost the whole of his time afflicted with some mental trouble, or engaged in destructive wars. But, of all the misfortunes or sorrows which it was his fate to encounter, and which it pleased God he should endure, none was so grievous to him as the rebellion of his favourite and dearly-beloved son, Absalom.

This favoured son having been accessory to the death of one of his brothers, in revenge for an offence committed against his sister, was obliged to leave his father's court, and fly for protection to the king of Geshar, with whom this prince continued about three years. But Joab, the principal general of king David's army, perceiving that David was most anxious to receive his son, and to behold him once more, so ordered it, that Absalom again returned, and was afterwards reconciled to his father. Yet this act of tenderness had nearly proved fatal to the affectionate father; for, no sooner had Absalom found that he was again fully restored to former favour, than he began

to form designs both against the crown and the king's life.

This young man was highly gifted with personal attractions; and, above all, was remarkable for the beauty of his hair, the surprising quantity of which excited much admiration. His manners, also, were so affable and engaging, that he was a universal favourite, as well with the people as with his father. Aware of these advantages, he made it his business to insinuate himself into the good will and affections of all he conversed with, by expressions of great kindness towards them, and with his readiness to serve them and do them right. He also intimated, that if he were king in Israel, he would take care to satisfy them all, by a speedy course of justice; so that none should have reason to complain. Having thus, for four years, endeavoured hard to make himself popular and draw a party after him, he desired leave of his father to go to Hebron, to perform a vow he had made to the Lord during his exile from the court of Jerusalem.

Absalom, having obtained his father's permission for this purpose, went immediately to Hebron, where he caused himself to be proclaimed king. David, being informed of this unexpected and distressing rebellion of his son, and that the people flocked from all parts to

him, was compelled to fly from Jerusalem on foot, accompanied only by six hundred of his guards, who usually attended on him; and passing on, he went up the mount Olivet barefoot, weeping and having his head covered, in proof of the extremity of his affliction.

In this condition, he bore, with extraordinary humility, all the revilings and bitter reproaches of Shimei, who flung stones at him and his officers as he passed by; for, fully conscious of his own sins, he meekly bore this insulting language, conceiving it the retribution of divine justice. Absalom, in the mean time, having made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, began his reign of usurpation; whilst David was taught, by sad experience, the instability of human greatness. His crimes were even punished by dreadful disorders in his own family; as he was in danger of death from his own son, and, to escape from it, was obliged to submit to a shameful flight. He was thus reduced to such extremities, that nothing less than his firm belief that the mercy of God would be again extended towards him, when his faults might be deemed sufficiently atoned for, could possibly have enabled him to support.

CHAP. XXII.

THE DEATH OF ABSALOM.

ABSALOM having, in so wicked and unjust a manner, become master of the city of Jerusalem, had now further to consider how he could most effectually depose and even destroy the king his father, so as to keep possession of the throne he had so unworthily usurped. To this end, he assembled his council, when Ahithophel, who was a man of superior knowledge, and the ablest counsellor of them all, advised that they should immediately pursue and attack David, before he could have time either to reinforce his army, or put them in order, and before he was recovered from the consternation so great a change of fortune must have occasioned.

Had this advice been pursued, it is most probable it would have proved fatal to David; but it pleased God to watch over and protect him, and frustrate the dreadful designs that were formed against him. Hushai, who was amongst

the followers of Absalom, was a secret friend of David, and he endeavoured all in his power to serve him. For this purpose, he opposed Ahithophel's counsel, and persuaded Absalom to reject it. He represented to him how dangerous the expedient would be, for many reasons, which he fully explained, to the satisfaction of that prince. Absalom was so far influenced by the judgment of Hushai, and by the strength of his reasoning, that he abandoned the plan suggested by Ahithophel, and adopted that of Hushai; which was, to summon all the forces of Israel, to put himself at the head of them, and to give battle to his father, king David, and the troops under his command.

When Ahithophel understood that the counsel of Hushai had prevailed over his own, he felt assured that the most fatal consequences must ensue; and being also provoked to find another's advice taken, whilst his, so much more to the advantage of Absalom, was neglected, his pride was so mortified that he went home and hanged himself.

David, in the mean time, being informed by his faithful servant, Hushai, of all that was going forward in the camp and councils of his son, took his measures accordingly; and by break of day, the next morning, had mustered and prepared his small but well-regulated army,

which he intended to lead himself against the enemy. But his great officers would not consent to his commanding the army in person, thinking that it would be exposing so valuable a life to too much risk. David was therefore reluctantly obliged to relinquish his intention; but his affection for Absalom overcame every other sensation, and he dreaded the consequences of his being defeated and taken; so he gave a strict and solemn charge to Joab, the principal general of his army, and all his other great officers, to spare the life of his beloved son, if the chance of war should place him in their power.

The armies being at last engaged, that of Absalom, notwithstanding the superiority of their numbers, was discomfited and compelled to fly. Absalom, seeing this unexpected turn of the day, determined to save himself also by flight; but riding on his mule, under the thick branches of an oak tree, his prodigious head of hair, which had caused so much admiration, and on which, most probably, he highly valued himself, became entangled in the boughs; and the mule, continuing its rapid course, left the unhappy prince hanging on the tree, totally incapable of extricating himself from his perilous situation.

Joab, being informed of this event by a per-

son who had seen the dreadful accident, was extremely angry with the man for not having immediately killed him; but the man reminded him of the king's command, that none were to lay violent hands upon the prince. Joab, finding that this injunction of David had a powerful influence over all the army, and that no one appeared disposed to do the deed he required, for fear of incurring the king's displeasure, went himself to the place, and struck Absalom with three darts through the body. He then caused a retreat to be sounded, to prevent any further effusion of blood.

Intelligence of the success of this battle, and of the death of Absalom, was instantly brought to the king; but the news of the victory, great and important as it was, could not be received by him with joy, when to that account was added, the tragical death of his darling son. And such deep mourning took possession of the heart of David for this loss, that it superseded every thought of the triumphs of victory; so that, when he was fully informed of the manner in which the fatal catastrophe had been effected, he immediately went up into his chamber and wept; and, as he went, in the utmost affliction he lamented him, saying: "Oh, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I

had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

But Joab, being made acquainted with the excessive grief of the king, and that mourning, instead of joy, filled the minds of all the people, he became very highly offended at this conduct in David, which he considered ungrateful, and disheartening to all his army. He therefore came to him, and very sharply reproved him; saying to him, that he seemed but little concerned for those who had done him such signal service, and had kept the crown upon his head; and he intimated to him, very freely, that he loved his enemies more than his friends, inasmuch that, if Absalom had lived, and they had all been killed, the king would have been well content. And Joab swore, that unless David would come forth and show himself to his people, and speak kindly to them, in acknowledgment of the great service they had done him, before the next light he should find himself forsaken by all, and plunged into a worse evil than any that had yet befallen him.

Upon this severe remonstrance from Joab, David showed himself to the people, though his grief for his son still continued.

After the death of Absalom, the chief men, who, during the troubles, had most openly declared themselves against David, were the first

to meet him and sue for pardon; and, for a while after this defeat of the rebel army, all things seemed to concur in preserving the peaceful state of the kingdom.

From this distressing example, all young people should ever bear in mind, how dreadful a crime it is to rebel against a parent, whose kind and affectionate care has nourished and brought them up. And though few are so wicked as Absalom proved to be; yet, whatever children do contrary to the order or wish of either father or mother, is an act of rebellion and disobedience against them, and is ever attended with bad consequences. To the parents it must cause great sorrow, when they find their dear children acting in opposition to their hopes and injunctions; and to the children, at least, it will be accompanied with not only self reproach and severe repentance, but the disapprobation of all good and worthy people, even if it does not bring them to such a fatal end as that which befel the unhappy prince Absalom.

CHAP. XXIII.THE DEATH OF KING DAVID, AND SUCCESSION
OF SOLOMON.

DAVID's increasing age and infirmities, gave reason to apprehend the approach of death, and occasioned his sons to be ready to contend about the succession to the royal dignity. Now, whilst all were in suspense to know who would be the new king, Adonijah, the king's eldest son, and younger brother of Absalom, being impatient to wear a crown, made a great feast. To this sumptuous entertainment he invited Joab, the great general of the king his father, and other grandees of the court, whom he had gained to be of his party, with intention to prevail on them to proclaim him king.

When the day appointed for completing this conspiracy was come, Nathan the prophet, who knew, from divine revelation, that Solomon was to succeed his father, and was likewise informed of the whole of this irregular proceeding, went

immediately to Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, and advised her to go and acquaint king David with the particulars of Adonijah's conduct, and with the consequences which might be expected to result from it. Bathsheba followed the discreet counsel of Nathan, and represented all these things to the king; and whilst she was yet speaking, Nathan came in also, and asked the king, whether or no it was by his consent that some of his subjects had declared Adonijah king.

David was greatly surprised by this intelligence, as he had never given the least encouragement to such a proceeding. And he immediately ordered Nathan the prophet to take some of his high officers with him, and go and anoint and proclaim Solomon king, he being the son whom he intended to succeed him.

Nathan accordingly obeyed the king's command; and the report of it spreading through the city, all those who had taken part with Adonijah thought proper to abscond. Adonijah himself, being now apprehensive of the consequences of Solomon's anger, and considering his life in danger, went and laid hold of the horns of the altar; to do which was at that time a sanctuary and protection from punishment, however great the offence which had been com-

mitted might be. Solomon hearing of this, promised to pardon him, on condition of his future good behaviour.

David did not survive these transactions more than six months; but before his death, God blessed him with strength of mind sufficient to instruct Solomon in every thing necessary for him to attend to in the government of his kingdom; and likewise communicated to him some private orders, which he strictly charged him not to fail in the execution of, after his death.

That melancholy event soon after happened; and Solomon became happily and quietly settled in his dominion, with a greater appearance of continued tranquillity than had been enjoyed by his predecessors. He had not long ascended the throne, before he made an alliance with the king of Egypt, and married his daughter.

Some time afterwards, God appeared to him in a dream, in Gibeon, where he had been offering a thousand burnt sacrifices, and bade him ask what he would of him. Solomon, considering that he was king over a great people—that sovereign power could not be well managed without a great share of wisdom and prudence—and, that the greater his elevation was, the stronger his obligation must be, to perform great and excellent actions, and to establish wise regulations, thought there was nothing which he

stood in need of so much as wisdom, by which he might be enabled to govern his subjects well and happily; and he therefore made that alone the subject of his petition to God.

The Lord was so well pleased with his request, which proved that he was in a great degree already possessed of what he requested, that he promised to bestow upon him such a measure of wisdom as never man had enjoyed before him, or ever should again after him. And, as he had not asked either riches or honours, which he seemed to undervalue in comparison with wisdom, he would, in addition to what he had solicited, give him a greater share of both than was ever possessed by any king before, or should be possessed by any after him.

Solomon having, by this means, obtained from God the superior gift of wisdom, in a greater degree than ever mortal was before known to possess it, had soon an opportunity of displaying it in its full lustre, and of spreading his fame far and near. For it so happened, that two women presented themselves before this great king, as he sat in judgment, earnestly desiring him to decide a difference between them. One of them being permitted to declare the case, she began by informing the king, that she and

the other woman lived in a house together, without any other inmates;—that each of them was the mother of an infant son;—and that her companion, three days after the birth of her child, had accidentally killed it in the night, by overlaying it;—that the woman, finding her child dead, had arisen at midnight, and stealing softly into her room, had taken away her child, which was nearly of the same age, and had placed the dead child by her side, in the same situation in which her son was placed when she retired to repose;—that, in the morning, when she awoke, she was overcome with surprise and sorrow, in finding, as she then imagined, her child dead on her bosom; but examining it thoroughly, in order to discover the cause of its death, she perceived that the child was not her own. She therefore immediately came to the judgment-seat of Solomon, to demand the restoration of her child from her wicked companion, who had so unjustly deprived her of it.

The other woman now being called upon, to know what she could answer to this accusation, strongly denied all that had been alleged against her; protesting, that the living child was hers, and that the dead child, which the first woman said she had found in that state on her bosom, was truly hers.

This case appeared, to every one who heard it, to be extremely intricate and difficult to be decided on; as there were no witnesses of the transaction, nor any proof to be brought forward, to convince the judge which of the women it was that spoke the truth. But Solomon, blessed by divine inspiration, determined on a line of conduct between them, which, he felt assured, would soon furnish him with the power of deciding to which the living infant did indeed belong. "I have heard," said the king, "what each of you have to say: this saith 'the living child is mine;' the other, 'not so, the living son is mine, and the dead one thine;' therefore divide the living child, and give the one half to one woman, and the other half to the other."

The true mother having heard this cruel sentence, was shocked beyond description: she fell on her knees at the foot of the throne, and earnestly supplicated the king to spare her innocent babe, and, rather than execute such a dreadful deed, to give the child entirely to her who so unjustly laid claim to it.

But the other unfeeling and treacherous woman approved of the sentence which was to cause the terrible death of the helpless little creature; saying, that as they could not agree concerning the child, it were best that it should be divided between them.

But king Solomon, who, it is to be understood, never had any intention of having so wicked a thing done as the murder of an innocent child, no sooner heard the different sentiments of these women, and observed the maternal distress and affectionate entreaties of the one woman, and contrasted it with the unnatural cruelty of the other, than he was convinced that his stratagem for discovering the real mother had fully succeeded; and, therefore, he instantly adjudged the living child to be immediately delivered to her who had so ardently solicited that its life might be spared, and who had thereby given so incontestable a proof of her being in reality its mother. And thus it was, that the great sagacity which Solomon exhibited on this occasion, led to a true judgment, in a case which was rendered difficult to decide from the circumstances attending it; but, by the method adopted by Solomon, the true mother was instantly discovered, and that in a manner which will ever continue to be admired.

CHAP. XXIV.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

KING Solomon, in pursuance of the dying request of his father, David, began and finished the magnificent temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, and furnished it in a manner suitable to the purpose for which it was intended—the worship of God, and the glory of his name. He then began to build a palace for himself, and it was thirteen years before it was completed. We are informed, that it was built in the most magnificent and sumptuous style; being enriched with gold and precious stones, so as even to dazzle the eyes of the spectators. And all the architecture, with the carved work, which was in great profusion, was most curious and wonderful to behold. These stately buildings, with their rich and costly ornaments, and many other instances of the princely munificence and surprising wisdom of Solomon, soon spread his fame throughout the world; and, in conse-

quence, brought to Jerusalem ambassadors from all the princes who had heard of Solomon's fame and power, who sought his friendship, to congratulate him on his most glorious exaltation, and to take a view of his more than regal magnificence, and of the wonderful works of art and ingenuity with which the noble city of Jerusalem then abounded. Indeed, he was justly considered as a prince surpassing every one who had gone before him, in wisdom and splendour; so that many princes travelled to Jerusalem from far countries, to see this happy and divinely-gifted monarch. But, above all others who testified a desire to see Solomon, was the queen of Sheba, otherwise called Ethiopia, who came from the furthest parts of the south, to convince herself whether the extraordinary reports she had heard of that surprising young king were true. For this purpose, she at length came to Jerusalem, accompanied with a train of guards and attendants, bringing with them a vast caravan of camels, laden with the most valuable spices and precious stones, all of which she made a present to the king; besides an hundred and twenty talents of gold, which amount in value to about eight hundred thousand pounds sterling.

This great and wise queen, after she had thus gratified her wish to know the truth of all she

had been informed concerning king Solomon, and had herself likewise observed and duly noted the unparalleled magnificence of his court and palaces, the wisdom of his discourse, his sagacity in answering questions, his penetrating insight into the deepest mysteries, the order of his house, the number of his officers and servants, the richness of their liveries, and the sumptuous elegance of every thing around him, she was overcome with astonishment and admiration. But no language can express the sentiments she was inspired with, equal to that of the Scriptures; it is therefore here introduced.

“And when she had beheld all these things, there was no more spirit in her. And she said to the king, It was a true report which I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I had heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.”

Thus this great queen returned back again to her own country, being fully contented with what she had seen and heard; as well as with the presents which she had received from Solomon, in return for those she had given him, and with the answers he had given to all her questions.

CHAP. XXV.

THE HISTORY OF QUEEN ESTHER.

THE great king and emperor, Ahasuerus, whose immense territories reached from India to Ethiopia, had under his command an hundred and twenty-seven provinces; and, as his dominions were of such vast extent, so was his power unlimited, the lives and property of his subjects being completely in his power, to dispose of according to his pleasure.

The sumptuous feasts which the Persians made on certain occasions, generally continued for forty days; though, when all the princes, nobles, and governors were entertained, they continued much longer. It was during one of

these magnificent feasts, which the king made in his palace at Shushan, when his heart was merry with wine, that he commanded his chamberlains in waiting to bring his beautiful queen, Vashti, before him, decorated in all her royal robes, with the crown upon her head, that he might show the nobles and princes who were with him how fair and beautiful she was. But Vashti, who conceived this request most degrading and insulting to her dignity and her delicacy, (the eastern ladies never being thus publicly exposed to the view of strangers,) positively refused to obey the king's command. Whereupon he became exceedingly incensed against her, unused as he had been to have his least order disobeyed. So he consulted with the assembled princes, as to the punishment which he should inflict on his queen for this disdainful conduct; and they unanimously advised him to send her away from him, and that he should choose for himself another queen, more deserving his affection than the disobedient Vashti was.

In compliance with these opinions, king Ahasuerus gave orders for all the most beautiful young women to repair to his court on an appointed day, that, from amongst them, he might fix upon one to supply the place of the banished Vashti. Amongst the number of those who on

this occasion were assembled, was Esther, a young Jewess, the niece of a worthy Jew, named Mordecai, who, on the death of her parents, had brought her up as his own. This young woman, above every other, found favour in the king's eyes, and he selected her from amongst all her fair competitors. So he put the royal crown upon her head, and she became queen instead of Vashti.

At the time when Esther was thus raised from obscurity, to be queen to so great and powerful a prince as Ahasuerus, that king had a minister, who was his greatest favourite, named Haman; and the king had raised Haman to the highest degree of honour, insomuch that all the king's servants bowed the knee before him. But Mordecai the Jew refused, being resolved not to give that honour to man, which he thought due to God alone. This refusal was not, however, the effect of pride, as Haman supposed it, but of piety; yet, notwithstanding the purity of his intentions, this want of respect to the proud favourite had nearly proved fatal; not only to Mordecai, but likewise to all the Jews within the dominions of this powerful monarch.

To effect the destruction of Mordecai, Haman represented to the king that there were, in his kingdom, a seditious set of people, who, being of a religion distinct from that of all other

nations, were always fomenting discord and strife, and stirring up rebellion in all places where they were suffered to live.

This credulous and tyrannic prince, without any further investigation, but merely upon the bare word of a wicked and malicious man, gave him leave to draw up such a declaration as he thought fit, containing an express command to all his subjects, that, on a certain day specified in the writing, they were to kill all the Jews throughout his whole kingdom, men, women, and children, without sparing any.

Esther, the niece of Mordecai, who, by a particular providence of God, was raised to be queen at this eventful period, was deeply afflicted at the dreadful calamity, which was thus ready to involve all her people; though she herself was out of danger, having, by the advice of her uncle Mordecai, carefully concealed from every person that she was a Jewess. As she, therefore, in this unexpected affliction, was considering how she should act, to avert the destruction which awaited her people, her uncle, who sent her word by her attendant of the danger which threatened them, advised her to present herself before the king, and to represent to him the horrid injustice of the decree he had given Haman leave to publish in his name.

Then Esther returned answer to Mordecai,

that what he proposed would not benefit the cause of her distressed friends, but only expose her to instant destruction; as there was a law, that all those who presented themselves before the king in his inner court, without permission, should be put to death; "except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live." Mordecai replied to this, that she must attempt it, as the only means left for their deliverance; and, if she did not, that she must not expect to escape in the universal calamity in which their whole nation was involved, by being in the king's palace. Also, that if her fears should stop her mouth in this time of extremity, God would raise up some other means of deliverance from the threatened destruction, but that she and her father's house would perish. And he added, that God had exalted her to the high station in which she was placed, that she might be the means of performing this service to her people.

This young and lovely queen being a devout and holy woman, and having attentively considered her uncle's advice, and the reasons he gave for her conduct, hesitated no longer, but resolved to expose her life, by risking the chance of the king's displeasure, rather than neglect the only means which presented for the saving her whole nation. She therefore advised, that

all the Jews should, by prayer and fasting, implore the blessing of God upon her undertaking, while she also, herself, joined in the like holy exercises; and on the third day after, she went and presented herself before the king.

Now God so ordered it, that when the king saw queen Esther standing in the court, she found favour in his eyes, and he held out the golden sceptre which was in his hand; and Esther, with due humility and respect, drew near and touched the top of it.

Then the king, in a tender and affectionate manner, demanded of her what was her desire; assuring her, that he could deny her nothing, even so far as to the half of his kingdom. Whereupon she humbly requested that the king and Haman would come the next day to a banquet, which she had prepared for them.

Then the king said: "Cause Haman to make haste, that he may be ready to attend at the queen's banquet, according to her request."

The vanity of Haman was most highly gratified by the distinguished honour thus conferred on him by queen Esther, in giving him such an extraordinary and unusual invitation, it being an almost unprecedented event. In the height of his exultation he hurried home, to give vent to the rapture of his heart, by communicating

to his wife and friends the happiness which attended him. On his way thither, however, he was a little disconcerted, by observing the hated Mordecai the Jew, as unbending in obedience to him as ever, sitting in the king's gate. But he comforted himself as well as he could, by reflecting how soon both he and all who belonged to him would be removed for ever from his sight.

CHAP. XXVI.

THE TRIUMPH OF MORDECAI, AND THE FALL OF HAMAN.

KING Ahasuerus, the night after Esther's unexpected visit and invitation to her banquet, finding that he could not sleep, employed those hours of silence in an occupation well worthy a good king; for, having ordered the public records of his kingdom to be brought, he commanded that they should be read before him. And taking notice of a passage which gave an account how Mordecai had discovered a secret

conspiracy formed against the life of the king, he demanded of his servant who read the book, what reward Mordecai had received for this extraordinary piece of service. The "king's servants, who ministered to him," replied, that he had not received any. Ahasuerus again asked, whether there was any person in the anti-chamber; and he was informed that Haman was there. Now Haman had come early that morning, to request an order from the king for the execution of Mordecai, on a gallows which he had erected; so the king commanded his servants to bid him come in.

As soon as Haman entered, the king asked him what he thought should be done to the man whom the king delighted to honour. Haman instantly imagining that he was the person to whom the king alluded, and whom it was his design to honour with some peculiar mark of his approbation, immediately replied, that the highest honour which could be desired by any one, was to be arrayed in the royal robes; to sit upon the king's horse, with the royal diadem upon his head; and that one of the most noble princes about the king should lead him through all the chief streets of the city, holding his horse by the reins, and proclaiming before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

Haman had no sooner given this answer to the king's question, than he commanded him to go immediately and execute the advice he had given, and to do to Mordecai the Jew all that he had spoken.

Thus the court and city of Shushan were witnesses of the sudden change in the very different conditions of these two persons: the humble Mordecai receiving the highest marks of honour, by the advice of his bitterest enemy, at the same moment that the proud and supercilious Haman was compelled to proclaim the glory of Mordecai, and bow before him whom he despised and hated in his heart. But having been forced to submit to this unwelcome office, in favour of his enemy, the mortification which he endured in consequence was insupportable; so that, in the utmost grief, he returned to his own house, and bitterly complained to his wife and friends of all that he had suffered, in having been forced to confer those honours upon another, which he had designed for himself; while that person was the man, above all others, whose destruction he was meditating, and which he thought he had fully accomplished.

The time being now arrived, which queen Esther had appointed for her banquet, king Ahasuerus, accompanied by Haman, came to partake thereof; when the king pressed her

to declare to him what she had to request, assuring her again that he would grant whatever she should ask, even though it were the half of his kingdom.

Thus encouraged, the joy and pleasure of the banquet were quickly changed into sorrow; for the remembrance of the destruction prepared for queen Esther and her whole nation now revived in her. She then, in the most pathetic manner, addressed herself to the king, and, with the looks and language of an humble and afflicted petitioner, entreated that he would grant to her prayer her own life, and the lives of her countrymen; at the same time telling him of the wickedness of Haman, who, by vile impositions and falsehoods, had deceived the king, and insolently had made use of his name and authority, to destroy the whole nation of the Jews.

Ahasuerus, who was not a bad man, was shocked to think to what an excess his own inattention, and the cruelty of his favourite, had like to have carried him; and he was so much troubled at the queen's remonstrance, that he rose up in haste, and took a walk in his private garden, to ruminate alone on Haman's inhuman and dreadful design.

Haman, being sensible of the extreme danger of his situation, from the anger of the king, cast

himself upon the queen's bed, to entreat her to become a petitioner for his life; but the king entering immediately, was still more highly offended by the liberty Haman had taken, and he gave orders that he should be hanged "on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified."

Ahasuerus afterwards published an edict throughout his dominions, quite contrary to his former one, in which he publicly owned the esteem he had for the Jews, and the assurance which he had of their being worthy and peaceable subjects.

Thus, by the death of one ambitious man, was so great an evil prevented as the cruel slaughter of many thousands of innocent people; and peace and quiet were established throughout all the dominions of this great king. Mordecai, who was a wise man, and who feared God, was now appointed chief minister of state, instead of that wicked and insolent favourite, Haman; and he ruled with such wisdom, mercy, and discretion, that it caused the Jews to be much esteemed every where; so that many people of the land turned to be of their religion.

CHAP. XXVII.

THE HISTORY OF DANIEL THE PROPHET.

DANIEL the prophet was descended from the royal line of the kings of Judah, and was carried to Babylon in his youth, by king Nebuchadnezzar, when he besieged Jerusalem.

During his captive state, Daniel was particularly careful to observe the law of God. He had three companions with him, whose names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who, as well as himself, had a daily portion of the king's meat and wine provided for them. Daniel being resolved not to pollute himself by partaking of what was forbidden by the Jewish law, desired the person who had been appointed to have the charge of them, to permit him and his companions to have pulse only to eat, and water to drink. But this person fearing that, by such abstemious living, they would become weak, and not continue to preserve the beauty of their appearance equal to the other Jewish youths under his care, and who were fed from the

king's table, felt unwilling to comply with their request. Whereupon Daniel entreated him to try the experiment only for ten days, and if, at the expiration of that time, he did not find him and his companions as well in their appearance as those youths who were entertained with the delicacies from the king's table, according to the royal appointment, they would afterwards submit to whatever he might think fit. To this reasonable proposition the officer consented; and, at the end of the ten days, found them in better health and fairer, than those who did partake the allowance from the king's table.

To make this great prophet the more illustrious and celebrated to all posterity, it pleased the Almighty to choose him as the instrument both to make known and to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. For this prince dreamed a dream, which strangely troubled and perplexed him, as being of a most extraordinary nature, though the particulars had escaped his memory. But the king, with the unreasonable impetuosity and inconsistency which generally attend on those to whom unlimited power is given, being anxious for an interpretation of his vision, sent for all his magicians and astrologers, to give him the satisfaction which he required; and at the same time he told them, that he had completely forgotten every incident of his dream.

It was in vain that these unhappy and bewildered men represented to him the utter impossibility of explaining the meaning of what was not communicated to them, and that all which their art could effect, was to expound the purport of a dream, when all the particular circumstances of it were told to them. But the king would not allow of any excuse for their incapacity to satisfy his desire; and he flew into an ungovernable rage, and commanded that all the magicians and astrologers should be put to death.

Daniel being informed of this cruel and unjust sentence, in which himself and his companions were likely to be involved, as they had been educated in the arts and knowledge of the Chaldeans, and consequently reckoned amongst the wise men, desired the captain of the king's guard for a while to suspend the execution of the king's order; and presenting himself before Nebuchadnezzar, declared to him that he could inform him of all the circumstances of the dream which had escaped his recollection, and also make known to him the interpretation thereof. And soon after, upon his earnest supplication to God, it was revealed to him what the king had dreamed. He therefore came to the king, and told him that he had seen in his dream a great image, whose head was gold, his breast

and arms silver, the lower part of his body brass, his legs iron, and his feet partly of iron and partly of clay. And that a stone, cut out of a mountain without hands, falling upon the feet of the image, broke it all to pieces. He further told him, that the head of gold represented his own kingdom; that of silver, another which should come after him, of less glory than his; which should be followed by a third of brass, and a fourth of iron, which should bruise and break the three foregoing kingdoms all to pieces.

King Nebuchadnezzar, when he heard his dream thus related, remembered it to be exactly as he had dreamed it; and being convinced that its interpretation was true, he was ready to fall down and worship Daniel, and to command incense and oblations to be offered to him. And he publicly declared, that now he was assured that Daniel's God was the God of all gods, and the sole revealer of secrets. From that time he raised Daniel to great honour, made him his lord lieutenant over all the province of Babylon, and superintendant and master over all the wise men of that city. And Daniel having requested that he might stay in the king's palace, entreated the king further, that he might be allowed to depute his three friends

and companions to take care of the government of the provinces: to this the king readily consented.

CHAP. XXVIII.

DANIEL.

SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO CAST INTO THE FIERY FURNACE.

SOME time after this wonderful event, Nebuchadnezzar made a great image of gold, and set it up in the plains of Dura, in the province of Babylon; and having summoned all the princes and nobles of his dominion to celebrate the dedication of this image, he commanded an herald to proclaim to all his subjects there assembled, that, upon hearing the sound of the musical instruments which were brought for that purpose, they should all fall down and worship this golden image; and, that whoever refused to do so, should be cast into a burning fiery furnace.

H

Some malicious and envious people having observed that the three friends of Daniel, now called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when all the rest of the company fell down upon their faces and worshipped the image, did not comply with the required ceremony, or express any adoration for the same, went and accused them before the king of this offence, and of a total inattention to the solemn commands of the king, in neglecting to worship the image which he had erected.

The king became extremely enraged when he heard of this contemptuous behaviour, and sending for these young men, he demanded of them, how they durst be so bold as to refuse compliance with his command; and he threatened, in case of their further refusal, to have them cast into a fiery furnace. He concluded his threats with these impious words: "And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

But this dreadful anger, which they saw the king give way to, did not in the least discompose the serene calmness and meekness of spirit of these holy men; who, with an astonishing unconcern and dignity, humbly, though firmly, represented to the king, that they were perfectly assured that the God whom they served was able to deliver them from the midst of the fiery

furnace, and likewise out of his hands ; but that, if it should not be the pleasure of their God to assist them in this extremity, they were resolved not to serve his gods, or worship the golden image he had set up.

King Nebuchadnezzar, seeing their holy constancy, and the little fear they seemed to entertain for his anger and threats, became transported to such an excess of passion, that the form of his visage was apparently changed ; and he commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than it was usual for it to be heated. He then ordered the most mighty men of his army to bind these holy men, and cast them into it immediately. This task they performed with the loss of their own lives ; for the furnace being so much overheated, the flames which proceeded from it instantly struck them dead.

God, in this instance, verified the promise which he has made to those who put their trust in him under affliction, that he would ever be with them in their greatest distress and trouble. For the angel of God visibly appeared in the furnace, protecting these young men, and restraining the violence of the fire ; which only consumed the cords wherewith they were bound, and left them to walk at full liberty in the furnace, where they felt a sweet refreshing dew

in the midst of the flames. And full of faith and confidence, of gratitude and thankfulness, they sung to the praise of God, for this wonderful protection, calling on all creatures to do the same.

The king, more transported now with astonishment, than he had previously been with rage and fury, commanded that these young men should immediately come out of the furnace. He now once more acknowledged his belief in the omnipotence of that God, whose angel he had seen protecting his faithful servants. He further commanded his subjects, upon pain of death, not to speak irreverently of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and he afterwards promoted them to the highest honours.

CHAP. XXIX.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S TRANSFORMATION.

KING Nebuchadnezzar being returned to Babylon, after his conquest of Egypt and his other victorious expeditions, was so elevated with his

triumphs and prosperity, that he suffered himself to be elated to an excess of insolence and arrogant pride. God therefore resolved to make a dreadful example of this ambitious prince, which should serve for a lesson to all other kings and princes, to teach them not to exalt themselves in a manner inconsistent with our imperfect nature; but to remember always, that the greatest sovereign is nothing more than a mere mortal man, liable to all the infirmities of human nature.

To this end, the Almighty represented to him in a dream the judgment which he intended to bring upon him. And Nebuchadnezzar having declared the same to Daniel, he interpreted it to him in this manner: "Thou didst see in thy dream, O king, a great tree, whose height reached up to heaven, and its branches spread to the ends of the earth: its leaves were fair and flourishing, and its boughs loaded with fruit: the beasts of the field fed under its shadow, and the birds of the air made their nests thereon. This great tree, O king, represents thyself, whose majesty is lifted up to heaven, and extended over all the earth. And whereas thou didst see a watcher and an holy one coming down from heaven, saying, Hew the tree down, and destroy it; yet leave the stump thereof in the earth, with a band of iron and brass,

in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts of the field, till seven times pass over him. This is the sentence which the Most High hath pronounced against my lord the king: that they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee eat grass as an ox, and thou shalt be wet with the dew of heaven; until that seven times pass over thee, and thou be made to acknowledge that the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth them to whomsoever he will. And whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the tree roots in the earth; this signifies, that thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after thou shalt have known that God ruleth over all."

This dreadful prediction was soon fulfilled in the manner following. As the king was walking in his palace in Babylon, admiring the works which he had made, and the magnificence of the city which he had built for his place of residence; and was exulting in the extent of his possessions, and the glory of his majesty, without giving the thanks to God for his mercies to him which a thankful heart would feel, there came a voice from heaven, saying, "O king Nebuchadnezzar, thy kingdom is departed from thee." And the same hour, the sentence which

had been pronounced against him was fulfilled ; for he was driven from amongst men, and did eat grass with oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven for seven years, even until his hair was grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

God manifested, by this terrible example, how severely he punishes secret pride of heart and excessive ambition, in thus casting this mighty prince from his throne, and levelling him to the condition of a beast ; because, in the arrogance of his imagination, he lifted himself up above the condition of a man, and forgot his duty to his Creator.

CHAP. XXX.

BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST.

BELSHAZZAR, king of Babylon, and grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, made a great feast, for a thousand of his princes and great lords, according to the manners of those times ; and being over anxious for the magnificence of his enter-

tainment, and regardless of the rules of religion and propriety, was not afraid to join impiety to luxury, and profanation to excess. He therefore commanded his servants to bring him the vessels of gold and silver, which his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken out of the temple of Jerusalem, that he and his princes, his wives, and his family, might drink out of them.

This sacrilegious contempt of the ordinance of God, and profanation of the vessels intended to be used in his service alone, offended the Almighty, who in those days frequently manifested his displeasure by some extraordinary event; and who, on this occasion, thought fit to amaze and terrify this unhappy prince in the midst of his luxurious feast, and in the presence of his court and nobles, with the appearance of a hand writing on the wall, which, in three words, gave the sentence of his condemnation.

Belshazzar being extremely frightened at this amazing prodigy, immediately called aloud to bring in all the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers, within his city. But on their arrival, they could not so much as read the writing, much less show the interpretation thereof. "Then," as the Scripture tells us, "was the king Belshazzar greatly troubled, his countenance became changed by fear, and all his great lords were astonished."

Upon which the queen mother, whose name was Nicotris, the wife of the great Nebuchadnezzar, hearing of the consternation and alarm which the king was in, came in the utmost haste to the banqueting house, and told the king, that he had in his dominions a man called Daniel, "in whom was the spirit of the holy Gods;" and whom his father, for his extraordinary endowments, and knowledge in expounding mysteries, had made master of all the magicians. He, she was assured, if sent for, could show the king the interpretation of the words which gave him so much trouble.

The holy prophet Daniel, who had so eminently distinguished himself in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, had retired from court on the death of that king, and had continued in seclusion during the reigns of Evilmersdach his son, and Belshazzar his grandson; in which time of solitude, God vouchsafed to favour him with all those wonderful visions related in the Bible, in the book bearing his name, wherein God discovered to him the succession of all the empires of the world, until the blessed kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Daniel being thus sent for, and appearing accordingly before the king, the highest honours and presents were promised him, if he should

prove able to interpret the words which conveyed such terror to the heart of the king and all around him. Daniel, however, unambitious and humble in his desires, slighted these favours, though he readily undertook to explain to the king the mystical sentence upon which he looked with so much horror and amazement. In solemn and appalling accents, he told Belshazzar, that, forasmuch as he had not humbled himself, nor taken example by the dreadful fate of his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, who, for his pride and the haughtiness of his spirit, was chased from amongst men, and for seven years together reduced to the condition of beasts; but had lifted himself up against the Lord of heaven, and profaned the vessels of God, dedicated to his holy service; therefore, that God, provoked by these crimes, had sent a hand to write his condemnation in these words: "Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." The interpretation of these words is, "God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." Belshazzar having heard this dreadful denunciation from the mouth of Daniel, however unwelcome and unexpected such a tremendous interpretation must have been, yet without delay bestowed upon the prophet the honours

which he had promised him; causing him to be clothed in scarlet, with a chain of gold about his neck, and to be proclaimed the third person in the kingdom.

These predictions were not long without their accomplishment; for Cyrus, the Persian monarch, being at this time before the city of Babylon with a great army, whilst the Babylonians, trusting to the strength of their walls, were feasting and making merry, contrived by stratagem to enter the city by a small breach, and the soldiers, penetrating into Belshazzar's palace, killed him that very night in which Daniel had given the interpretation of the handwriting on the wall.

This was a dreadful example of the folly and wickedness of ostentation and vanity, which led this great prince to profane the sacred vessels, and to other acts of impiety, that finally brought destruction upon him.

CHAP. XXXI.

DANIEL IN THE DEN OF LIONS.

DARIUS the Mede, having become possessor of all the dominions of Belshazzar, by means of the victory of his nephew Cyrus, greatly honoured Daniel. He looked upon him as a person filled with the spirit of God, because he had been informed that he had formerly foretold to Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar his grandson, the fate which awaited them. In consequence of these instances of his knowledge, and of his favour with his God, Darius began to form thoughts of promoting him over the whole kingdom, by making him his viceroy. But the more the king was thus pleased to honour and to heap favours upon Daniel, the more he stirred up the envy and hatred of his great princes and officers against him. They were highly irritated to see Daniel, a captive Jew, thus caressed by Darius, and ever the highest in his royal favour; and their jealousy and in-

dignation occasioned them to watch Daniel very narrowly, in hopes of an opportunity to observe in him some fault or indiscretion, of which they might accuse him to the king, and thus injure him in the king's estimation. But they strove in vain to discover any blemish in Daniel; for his private life, and his management of public affairs, were alike irreproachable. So they began to despair of ever finding any thing of sufficient consequence to charge him with; except, by their contrivance, a case might occur in which the law of his God was concerned.

In the hope of effecting their purpose, they persuaded the king to put forth a declaration, that whomsoever should prefer any petition either to God or man, except to the king Darius himself, for the space of thirty days, should be cast into the den of lions.

Daniel was fully aware that this wicked law was made only to entrap and destroy him, yet he alone was resolved not to obey it; for, preferring the law of God before that of man, he continued, thrice every day, to pray to God in his chamber, with his window open towards Jerusalem. His enemies having therefore watched him, and observed him to pray the same as before the king issued his declaration, presented themselves before Darius, with hearts full of joy, from the hope they entertained of completing

the destruction of Daniel. They therefore eagerly accused him of disobedience to the king's decree, and desired the execution of the sentence against him, which he had incurred in consequence.

Darius, who had the highest esteem for Daniel, was grieved to the heart when he heard this accusation, and condemned himself severely, for having been prevailed on, by these artful men, to publish so unjust and foolish a decree. However, on this occasion, he did his utmost endeavour to deliver the holy prophet of God out of the hands of his enemies.

But the enemies of Daniel perceiving the king's design, and being fully resolved, if possible, to destroy the prophet, represented to Darius, that the royal decree could admit of no alteration, as, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, whatever was once ordained, could never afterwards be changed, under any circumstances; and therefore, that the penalty which followed any violation of the king's declaration, must be carried into execution without further delay, and that Daniel must assuredly be cast into the den of lions.

This representation was strictly correct, as it was not even in the power of the king to mitigate any law which had once passed. The king was therefore compelled, though sorely

against his inclination, to comply with the cruel and unjust desire of these wicked men, and he ordered Daniel to be cast into the den of lions. At the same time, however, he expressed the hope which he entertained, that the God whom Daniel served would not fail to deliver him from the jaws of the lions, and from the hands of his persecutors. And in this faith the king was not deceived; for, as the uneasiness which he suffered on account of Daniel's condemnation would not permit him to rest, he rose the next morning very early, and went immediately to the den. Though oppressed by fear and distress as to Daniel's fate, yet he was not so destitute of hope that Daniel still existed, as to prevent his calling on him by name; when the good Darius found, to his excessive joy, that Daniel was not only alive, but safe and well, without having received the slightest injury from the ferocious animals.

The joyful king, expressing, in animated terms, his astonishment at this miraculous preservation, Daniel informed him, that God had sent his angel into the den, who had stopped the lions' mouths, and had prevented them from doing him any harm; because God knew his innocence, however his best actions might be misrepresented by men.

The king, delighted to hear this explanation,

and to see the person whom he so highly prized thus wonderfully preserved from such a terrific situation, commanded that he should be instantly taken out of the den; and, at the same time, he ordered that all Daniel's accusers should be cast into the very den from which he had so providentially escaped. On these wretched victims the enraged lions immediately seized, and they were devoured before they even had reached the bottom of the den.

And thus was Daniel rescued by the hand of the Almighty from the persecution of these envious and designing men, and ever afterwards lived in the esteem of the king, and in the enjoyment of the honours he had conferred upon him.

CHAP. XXXII.

JONAH AND THE WHALE.

God commanded the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh, to declare to that great city that it should be destroyed, because of the sins of its

inhabitants, which demanded such signal punishment; but Jonah appeared exceedingly reluctant to obey this command, and instead of complying with it, went down to Joppa, to ship himself directly for Tarshish.

Nothing undertaken without the approbation of God, can ever be attended with a good effect; so God, to make this manifest, and to show that he can accomplish his intentions even by the resistance and opposition which men make against them, raised a great storm, which threatened the vessel in which Jonah had embarked with instant shipwreck. The mariners were so terrified at this storm, that they cast all the goods which were on board into the sea, in hopes, by thus lightening the vessel, she might better encounter the raging tempest.

Jonah, sensible of the sin he had been guilty of, in endeavouring to evade the command he had received from God, could not help feeling and acknowledging the hand of God in this tremendous storm; and being grieved for this sad effect of his disobedience, and shocked to look upon the convulsions of nature he had thus occasioned, went down into the hold of the ship, that he might avoid so dreadful a sight. Here, however, it so happened, that he fell fast asleep, occasioned, more probably, by fatigue and sorrow, than by any indifference or insen-

sibility as to the danger that surrounded him, which, indeed, he knew was extremely imminent; and his distress of mind was the greater, as he was well aware that the punishment of his offence had plunged so many innocent people into their present unhappy situation.

The master of the ship was surprised at finding that Jonah could sleep when all were in such extremity; and he thought himself blamable for permitting one man to remain in tranquillity and repose, whilst all the ship's crew and passengers were either using their best exertions to save the vessel, or else were employed in prayers to their gods for protection from the perils which threatened to overwhelm them. He therefore called loudly upon Jonah to arise, either to lend his assistance to the mariners, or to entreat his God to save them from perishing.

The storm, however, still increasing, and by its violence frustrating all the endeavours of the crew to render its destructive course less alarming and dangerous, some of the company began to surmise, and declared it to be their opinion, that such an unusual storm could only be caused as a punishment of an extraordinary and dreadful crime, committed by some person then on board; for the discovery of which they

proposed to cast lots, that they might know who was the guilty individual.

This plan being generally approved, it was accordingly put in practice, when the lot fell upon Jonah. Greatly shocked at this confirmation of their fears, they all earnestly demanded of him who he was, and what he had done, thus to stir up the anger of Heaven against himself and them also? Upon being thus questioned, Jonah very freely confessed the truth; observing further, that he was convinced he was the only cause of the tempest which still tossed them. They then demanded of him, what they should do to him, that the storm might cease? With the utmost composure and fortitude Jonah answered, that if they desired a calm sea, they must instantly throw him overboard; for it was for his sake alone they endured such perils.

The master and ship's crew were exceedingly surprised by this free and undisguised confession, and by the noble and generous proposition Jonah had made, of sacrificing himself in the hope of procuring their safety. This conduct made a deep impression on the mind of each one in his favour; and they were all influenced by pity for him, even more than he appeared to feel for himself. So they again cheerfully endeavoured hard to reach the land; but finding

that all their exertions were to no purpose, and that the sea still ran high against them, they at last found themselves under the necessity of casting Jonah into the ocean. This terrible act was sorely against the inclination of the humane and benevolent crew; and, as they cast him forth from their ship, they earnestly appealed to God to acquit them of Jonah's blood, as he well knew how gladly they would have saved Jonah's life, had it been possible for them to have done so.

The mariners had no sooner done this distressing deed, than the sea ceased from raging, and the ship safely pursued her way. In the mean time, the Lord had prepared a great fish (supposed to be a whale) to swallow up Jonah, who, when in the inside of this monster, being sensible of God's mercy in permitting him still to exist in so miraculous a manner, sang forth, in that dreadful situation, the praises of the Lord. After he had remained in this living grave for three days and three nights, God as wonderfully released him from this horrid inclosure; for he caused the fish to vomit him forth on the dry land.

CHAP. XXXIII.

THE PREACHING OF JONAH, AND THE
REPENTANCE OF THE NINEVITES.

AFTER Jonah's extraordinary preservation and deliverance, God commanded him a second time, to go to Nineveh and preach to that great city, and to declare the commission he had charged him with. Jonah now no more studied evasions, but, by his ready obedience, manifested how much he had profited by the affliction God had visited him with; and that he was now ready and anxious to comply with the divine will, however difficult, or contrary to his own, it might appear to be. In this disposition he went, contrary to the custom of all other prophets, to preach to a people who were heathen idolaters, inhabiting one of the largest cities in the world, which, the Scripture tells us, "was three days' journey in length." And when Jonah was advanced into the city about one day's journey, he lifted up his voice and cried:

“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”

The inhabitants of that city being exceedingly terrified with the denunciation of Jonah, and believing the word of God, which they had heard through the mouth of his prophet, with an humble faith proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth. This was considered as a mark of the greatest distress; and, in the present instance, was adopted by the people from the highest to the lowest, to the end that their sorrow and repentance might be as general as their errors and their sins had been; and that, as no age, sex, or quality had been free from contributing to the guilt, so none ought to be exempted from the penance that might be thought necessary to make atonement for it.

The king of Nineveh being himself strangely alarmed with the news of the sudden and utter destruction which threatened him and his subjects, came down from his throne, and resigned all his royal robes and costly ornaments, to put on sackcloth and sit in ashes. And, not contented with exciting his subjects to repentance by his example only, he published an edict, and caused it to be proclaimed throughout the city, that neither man, nor beast, nor herd, nor flock, should eat or drink any thing for a specified time;—that all his subjects should apply them-

selves to God in earnest prayer and supplication;—and that every one of them should turn from his evil ways, and from the violence which was in his hand: “For who can tell,” said the king, “but God will take pity upon me, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not.”

Thus the inhabitants of a whole city, and one so very extensive as Nineveh was, humbled and debased themselves before the presence of God, from the king upon his throne to the most humble of his subjects; which moved the pity and compassion of God towards them, and, in his great mercy, he received their sincere repentance acceptably. And now, beholding that the sentiments of their hearts were changed, he likewise changed that sentence of destruction which had been pronounced against them; and their hearty repentance prevented the threatened punishment.

Jonah perceiving that God had repealed his sentence pronounced against the great Nineveh, and averted the evil that he had declared would come to pass, was exceedingly displeased; fearing that, on this account, he should be considered as a false prophet. This idea gave him inconceivable trouble; and, indeed, the fear he entertained on this head made so deep an impression upon him, that he gave himself

up to grief, lamentation, and discontent, and had the presumption to complain to God of the unseasonable mercy (as his passion represented it to him) which it had been his almighty pleasure to show to these penitent people. He therefore besought God to take away his life, because, thus circumstanced, it seemed far more desirable for him to die than to live.

The Lord, ever long-suffering and merciful, bore with this weakness of his servant Jonah ; only appealing to his own reason, whether or not he did well to be angry. But Jonah was not to be appeased by so mild a rebuke, which the Lord had given him with the intention of making him reflect on his unseemly behaviour. Being come out of the city, he made himself a booth on the east side of it, and placed himself under the shadow of it to rest, and to see what would become of Nineveh and its inhabitants. And it pleased God, for the purpose of making his little hermitage more cool, shady, and desirable, to cause a gourd to spring up in one night, which, by the next morning, covered his bower, affording to him a very cool and grateful shelter from the oppressive heat of the day.

Jonah was highly delighted by this unlooked-for and most seasonable refreshment. But it was of very short continuance ; for God had

prepared a worm, which eating into the root of the gourd, it soon withered, and left Jonah again exposed to the violent heat of the sunbeams. The heat was the more intense, as God sent with it a vehement east wind, which, with the scorching rays of the sun beating upon his head, made him faint, and increased the discontented disposition of his mind to such an extreme degree, that a second time he earnestly desired of God that it would please him to permit him to die. But God took occasion from the passionate temper of Jonah, and the transport of impatience which agitated the prophet's mind, to make him apprehend how contrary it was to the divine mercy to punish the crimes of mankind, when they had repented of them, and how great a violence it would have been to his goodness and inclination to pardon sins, had he been obliged to destroy the great city of Nineveh; and he demanded of Jonah, whether he did well to be angry for the gourd. Jonah answered: "It is well to be angry, even unto death."

God was too merciful to Jonah to be offended with this peevish and very improper answer; and he further condescended, as a proof of his patient forbearance with the frailties of poor mortal man, to point out to him,

in gentleness, the extreme aggravation which he had offered to his indulgence, by a remonstrance on his own conduct, and on the injustice of which he had been guilty. "For," continued the Almighty to him, "thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not laboured, neither made it grow, which came up in a night, and perished in a night. And shall not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than fourscore thousand persons, that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?"

It appears, from all the circumstances here related, that Jonah was a man of an unhappy and discontented temper, although a prophet; and, in this case, that he was fearful of being accounted a false prophet, and of having his predictions exposed to contempt, or his person probably to violence, from the Ninevites, because the event did not correspond with what he had foretold. This story also represents to us, in the most forcible manner, the mercy and long suffering of God to a sinful nation, and also to a simple individual; for he pardoned the guilty Ninevites on their sincere repentance; and he forebore to punish the peevish repinings of Jonah. It shows also, the strange excesses that pride and passion can hurry men into;

for it was pride which excited in Jonah such an excess of anger, and which had such an ascendancy over his mind, that he thought it preferable even to die, rather than to live under the imputation of being a false prophet.

THE NEW TESTAMENT.

CHAP. I.

THE NATIVITY.

THE time which God had appointed to show forth his mercy, in giving a Saviour to the world, being arrived, according to the predictions of the prophets, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to Zacharias the high priest, as he was offering incense in the temple, to inform him that he should have a son, who should be called John, and whose birth was to be the joy and glory of Israel.

The angel Gabriel was next sent to Mary, the mother of our blessed Saviour. The angel saluted her with this gracious message: "Hail, thou who art greatly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." She was full of amazement at this wonderful occurrence; and the extraordinary salutation of the angel at first troubled her exceedingly. She

was uncertain whether it was a good or an evil spirit which addressed her; but the angel, well knowing her perplexity, to encourage her, said: "Fear not, Mary, thou hast found favour with God." And then he declared to her the message upon which he had been sent to her, which was, that she should bare a son, whom she was to call Jesus; who should reign over the house of Jacob, and sit on the throne of his father David; and whose kingdom should have no end.

When the holy virgin had received from the angel this happy assurance, she testified her perfect resignation to the will of God in these humble words, which admirably show the pious disposition of her soul: "I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

When the time of our Saviour's birth was very near, it so happened, that the emperor Augustus Cæsar, being desirous either to satisfy his pride or his avarice in numbering the families in his empire, published an edict, that all the world should be taxed. This order compelled Joseph, the husband and guardian of the holy virgin, to come with his espoused Mary to Bethlehem, he being of that town and of the lineage of David, to be taxed according to the emperor's decree.

When they were arrived at Bethlehem, every one refused to lodge them, because, in consequence of this new and troublesome law, their houses were full of people, who had arrived for the same purpose as Joseph and Mary. They could not, therefore, obtain any place of rest or accommodation, except the shelter of a stable; and in this humble and destitute place was our blessed Saviour born. Here it was, as the Scriptures inform us, "that she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the inn."

The first persons to whom the birth of our Saviour was made known, were some humble shepherds, who were watching their flocks in the fields, in the very night in which he was born; and the angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, so that they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them: "Fear not; for I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the child wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

Having told the shepherds this surprising and joyful event, the birth of the long-expected

Messiah having actually taken place, he added, to confirm them further in their belief of his information, that they should instantly depart for Bethlehem, which the prophets had foretold should be the place of his birth, and there, according to what he had said, they would find in a manger the holy infant, who was "the expectation of all Israel."

These shepherds recovering themselves at length from the astonishment or trance wherein they lay, occasioned by the sight of the angel and the extraordinary words he had communicated to them, determined to pass directly over to Bethlehem, to see the prodigy which God had wrought. And they made haste in their journey, being full of hope and joy. And when they had arrived at the place pointed out by the angel, they found the blessed virgin with Joseph, and the holy child reposing in the manger, according to what the angel had related to them.

This outward meanness did not at all surprise them; on the contrary, they were filled with admiration and rapture, as were all those to whom they told what they had themselves seen and heard from the angel. And they returned to their occupation, glorifying God for the blessing thus sent unto them, which was the emblem of peace upon earth, and good will towards all mankind.

CHAP. II.THE ADORATION OF THE WISE MEN OF
THE EAST.

ALTHOUGH our Saviour Jesus Christ was born in Judea, yet he came into the world not only on account of the Jewish people, but that his grace should be shown abroad to the Gentiles also, or, in other words, to all the world, let their worship or idolatry be what it might; for it was to draw the ignorant from the worship of false gods, and to guide them in the path of true belief, that our Saviour took upon him a mortal form. To effect this, and to represent more fully the benefit and grace which he intended to all mankind, he caused a star to shine at his birth, which had never before been visible to human eye.

The magi and wise men in those times being excellent astronomers, observed with surprise this new star in the east; and their admiration was the greater, as they well knew it denoted

the birth of the sovereign of the Jews. In consequence of this assurance, they immediately prepared themselves to go with presents into Judea, to offer to him and to pay him homage.

Herod, who was the king of the Jews, was troubled when he heard of a new king being born to these people; and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who waited in wondering expectation for the Messias, heard the news of his birth with much agitation and concern. Herod, therefore, on hearing the unwelcome intelligence, instantly assembled all the priests and elders of the people, and demanded of them "in what place Christ should be born."

In answer to Herod's enquiries, the priests and elders told him, that Christ was to be born "in Bethlehem of Judea;" as it was written by the prophet, "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

Herod being thus far informed by the priests concerning the object of his jealousy, became still more alarmed at the information they had given him. He next secretly called the wise men into his presence, and enquired of them concerning the star which had led them thus far on their way in search of this most wonder-

ful child; for its appearance to them in so extraordinary a manner, Herod said, had filled him with great anxiety, and he was very desirous of further information respecting it. These innocent men being perfectly free from apprehension or dread, answered the king without hesitation, all the questions he asked them, in a full and faithful manner; and explained to him, to the best of their power, the influence which the star had effected upon them, and the knowledge they had of what it portended.

The hypocritical king, artfully concealing his wicked designs from these good and worthy men, commended their zeal and their knowledge; and hiding his premeditated design of killing this infant under the disguise of adoration, entreated the wise men "to search diligently for the young child; and when they had found him, to return and let him know, that he might have an opportunity of worshipping him also."

These wise men, highly pleased with the king's affability, and with his devout intention, departed from Jerusalem, totally ignorant of the base design of this cruel tyrant. And seeing again the star which had thus far guided them, they were filled with joy and thankfulness, and with full assurance entered the house which the star appeared to point out to them. And find-

ing the child there with his mother, they fell down and worshipped him; disregarding the meanness of the situation they found him in. They then opened their treasures, and offered him presents of gold, myrrh, and frankincense.

They now intended to return to king Herod, according to his injunction; but it pleased the Almighty to prevent them, by warning them in a dream to go back another way.

CHAP. III.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

KING Herod continued still expecting the return of the wise men, with the intelligence he required of them, and he bore their absence for some time with temper and moderation; but when a much longer period had elapsed than he thought the nature of the business required, and that they returned no more, he began to imagine that they had mocked and deceived him; and he attributed their neglect of his command to a want of respect for his person,

not knowing that the wise men had pursued another course by the express order of Heaven. He therefore fell into a most ungovernable passion, and was more determined than ever to destroy him to whom the name of king had been already given, lest the Jews acknowledging him to be their master, he should lose his crown and kingdom. But God, to render abortive the cruel design of this wicked prince, sent an angel in the night to Joseph, who thought now of returning home from Jerusalem to Nazareth, to warn him of the danger which attended the child. And he was commanded immediately to take the infant and his mother, and to carry them into Egypt, as it was the intention of Herod to use every method he could devise to destroy him.

Joseph, who on this, as on all other occasions, is an admirable model of obedience to the divine will, immediately, though it was midnight, took the young child and its mother, and fled towards the land of Egypt. Though this was a troublesome journey, and they were going into a foreign country which was wholly given up to idolatry, all objections and difficulties appeared trifling, compared with the threatened danger which had been announced to Joseph by the angel. The only thought which now occupied their minds, was to preserve the holy infant from the fury of Herod, and to take the

course for his safety which Heaven had directed. Thus they went into the land of Egypt, to find that safety which was not to be found even amongst a people whom God had delivered by so many miracles.

Being arrived at the end of their journey, and now in a place of security, God permitted Herod to proceed to the execution of his barbarous purpose. And this wicked man, with a cruelty which the most savage people would abhor, and at which all succeeding generations must shudder, put to death all the innocent little children in Bethlehem and the neighbouring parts, who were under the age of two years; in hopes, in this general destruction, that the infant whose birth, with its prognostics, had given him so much fear and uneasiness, would be destroyed indiscriminately with the rest. But the policy of this prince, who was considered one of the greatest politicians of his time, was frustrated, and he was made to tremble by the existence of a single infant, to destroy whom he had in vain laid all the snares of art and violence. By the cruel enterprise he engaged in for that purpose, he has rendered himself an object of execration to all succeeding ages; and also an example of the dreadful effects of indulging in violent passions, and of the danger attendant on entrusting unlimited power in the hands of any mortal man.

CHAP. IV.

CHRIST AND THE DOCTORS.

AFTER the death of Herod, whose persecuting vengeance had confined Joseph and his family in Egypt, an angel was again sent, by the command of God, to order him to return into the land of Israel; so that the whole time of his sojourn in Egypt did not exceed one year. Joseph obeyed this new command with the same readiness with which he had attended to the first, and came and dwelt in the town of Nazareth, to avoid the fury of Archelaus, the son of Herod, who reigned in Judea; by which means, also, a prophecy was accomplished, which foretold that our Saviour should be called a Nazarene.

The Gospel does not take notice of any thing which passed from our Saviour's infancy to his baptism by St. John, except only the following circumstance, which took place when he was at the age of twelve years. It was the custom of

Mary the mother of Jesus, punctually to observe all the public devotions of her time; and she went every year, with Joseph and with her blessed son, from Nazareth, where she dwelt, to Jerusalem, at the feast of the passover, according to the ordinances of the law.

When Jesus was twelve years old, after the ceremony of the feast was accomplished, his parents returned to Nazareth, and our blessed Saviour, whom they thought was in their company, remained behind in Jerusalem, unknown to Joseph and his mother.

They travelled a day's journey before they missed him; but at night their alarm was excessive, in finding that he came not to them. In vain they sought him amongst their kindred and acquaintance, who, having been at Jerusalem on the same solemn occasion as themselves, were returning home likewise; for they found him not with any of those whom they knew, and amongst whom they thought themselves certain of meeting with him. But disappointed in this expectation, they became exceedingly troubled; and as soon as day broke the next morning, they went back to Jerusalem to seek him. At length, after three days of unremitted and painful search for him, "they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions." And

he was rather teaching than learning any thing that was in dispute; insomuch, that "all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers." The holy mother was surprised to see him in such a place, and in such circumstances; and her joy in finding him far exceeded the trouble which his loss had given her, that being forgot in the pleasure of again beholding him. Yet she could not help complaining of the distress his behaviour had given them, saying, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." And he said unto them, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them." Having said these words, he returned with his parents to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.

From this incident, children may form some idea of the anxiety and solicitude which a parent experiences for the safety and happiness of his child; as even Mary and Joseph, who well knew the divine nature of our Saviour, could not divest themselves of their parental fears, when they found he had separated him-

self from their society. How much, therefore, does it become the duty of every good and sensible child, to study to return the tender affection of his parents, by a careful attention never to give cause of alarm or uneasiness to those to whom he is under such infinite obligation; but, to the utmost of his ability, to do every thing in his power to make them contented and happy, and, by constant good conduct, to repay the anxious care bestowed by them on his helpless infancy.

CHAP. V.

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS CHRIST, AND THE MARRIAGE IN CANA.

THIRTY-TWO years having elapsed since the birth of our Lord, it became the will of God to draw him out of the concealed state in which he had hitherto remained, and to manifest him to the world. He began this great and memorable event, by bringing John the Baptist, who was ordained to be his messenger, out of the

desert. This holy man then left the wilderness, where he had led a solitary life, having, as the Scripture says, "his raiment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle about his loins; his meat being locusts and wild honey." He appeared upon the banks of the river Jordan, and in the wilderness of Judea, preaching repentance, and baptizing all that came to him for that purpose.

The extreme austerity and virtue of his life, with the gentleness of his manners, needed no miracle to gain him followers and friends, or a firm belief in the truth of his doctrine. For all people regarded him as something more than man; and he was judged by some to be the Messias, whom they had been so long expecting, from the prophecies which had foretold his appearance in the world about this time.

When, therefore, all Jerusalem, thus pleased by his preaching and his conduct, went thronging in multitudes to him into the wilderness, to hear this holy messenger and forerunner of our Lord, and to be baptized by him, our Saviour came also. But he hid himself amongst the crowd, with a humility which may serve as an example to all vain and ambitious men, who are but too apt to use a thousand arts to draw attention and make themselves conspicuous, if they conceive they have even the slightest pretensions above the general run of people. Our

Saviour's manners were ever humble and meek; yet, though he debased himself in this manner, it was the pleasure of his Almighty Father to exalt and raise him up, and distinguish him from those he had mixed himself with; for John the Baptist, being struck with a profound respect, could not, without much difficulty, resolve to pour water upon him to baptize him. He that had caused the chiefest doctors of the law to tremble, and had driven them from his baptism, was in his turn now struck with such an awe and reverence of the great personage before him, though veiled under the most humble appearance, that he immediately cried out to our Saviour: "I have need to be baptized of thee; and comest thou to me?" Our Lord only answered, that he must humble himself thus far, and that, in the condition in which he was, he must submit to every ordinance; for, "to fulfil all righteousness" became now his duty.

No sooner was he baptized, than the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit visibly descended upon him in the form of a dove, and rested on his head; and at the same time a voice was heard from heaven, giving this confirming testimony: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

Our Saviour immediately upon this retired to conceal himself; but the Baptist continued

to speak of him to all people, endeavouring to persuade all his followers that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah, so often promised and so greatly desired; and that, as to his own particular, though he might appear considerable to them, he assured them he was unworthy to unloose the latchet of our Saviour's shoe, and that he must decrease in his fame, as he was now obscured by so infinitely a surpassing light.

As soon as our Saviour was baptized, he left the wilderness, and began to manifest himself to men, coming from thence to Jordan, the place of John the Baptist's usual residence. John having observed what passed at the baptism of Christ, now cried out to his disciples: "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world." Two of his disciples, one of whom was Andrew, hearing their master give such an advantageous testimony of our Lord, immediately attached themselves to him.

They asked him where he dwelt; and our Saviour having showed them the place, Andrew, in great transport, informed Simon his brother that he had met with the Messiah; and he brought him to Jesus, who, looking on him, foretold that he should in future be called Peter.

The number of our Saviour's auditors increasing, his reputation began also to be spread

abroad, although, as yet, he had performed no miracle; but a particular accident, and the exigencies of some persons, gave occasion to the following.

There was a marriage in Cana, a town of Galilee, "and the mother of Jesus" was present: our Saviour and his disciples were also invited to it, and joined the company accordingly. But the wine not holding out, it gave Mary an opportunity of showing her tenderness and her faith, in being persuaded of the all-sufficient power of her son, as well as of his kindness and charity. She felt assured she needed only to inform him of the necessity those persons were in, to procure his ready help; and she was not deceived in her expectations. But our Saviour appeared at first to answer in a manner very unusual with him, who was all gentleness and compliance; for he said to her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." Yet, notwithstanding this, he failed not in doing what she required; for his mother had previously given orders to the servants, "Whatever he saith unto ye, do it. And there were six water-pots of stone, after the manner of the Jews, containing two or three firkins a piece, which Jesus commanded them to fill with water; and they filled them to the brim." Jesus having miraculously changed this water into wine,

he commanded it to be drawn out, and given to the governor of the feast.

The governor being surprised at the excellency of this wine, called the bridegroom aside, and told him, he had done contrary to the custom which was generally observed on such occasions. "For every man at the beginning," he continued, "sets forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse." Thus did our Saviour manifest his glory, and his disciples believed on him.

CHAP. VI.

CHRIST STILLETH THE TEMPEST.

OUR Saviour returned to Galilee in consequence of being informed that John the Baptist had been imprisoned for his preaching, his doctrines being contrary to the received religion of that time. And he also began to preach there publicly, and to exhort them to repentance, because the kingdom of God was at hand.

He accompanied his preaching with a gravity

and authority which wonderfully distinguished him from all the doctors of the law, joining graceful action to his words. And the miracles which he wrought, gave fresh testimony every day of the truths which he taught.

He healed in Cana a certain great man's son, who was at the point of death ; and cast an evil spirit out of a man possessed. Passing out of the synagogue where he had performed this miracle, he entered into the house of Simon Peter, where another opportunity offered to show his power ; as the mother of Peter's wife then lay ill of a violent fever, which he instantly cured. This miracle most powerfully engaged Peter to follow our Saviour, though he had, in witnessing a previous miracle, been so much struck with awe, that he had thrown himself at the feet of Christ, entreating him to retire from him, as he was a sinful man.

So many signs and miraculous cures drew the sick from all parts, as well as others who were oppressed with affliction, who came to seek in him a remedy for their griefs ; and the people crowded about him, to share the double joy of hearing his sermons, and of being witnesses of his astonishing miracles.

But the disciples of Jesus being too vain of the honours which they received in following him, were instructed by their master, by de-

grees, not to expect from him a temporal felicity; and therefore, to give them some prospect of their future condition, if they continued his disciples, he engaged them to pass an arm of the sea with him. In their passage, there arose a great tempest, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves; which so terrified his disciples, that they came to our Saviour, who was asleep, and awakened him, saying, "Lord, save us: we perish." And he said unto them, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" It was thus he reprehended them for their unnecessary fear; and showed them, that whilst he was their companion, they need not fear the consequences of any danger which could assail them. He then immediately arose, and commanded the winds to be still and the sea to be calm; and this command being immediately obeyed, the fear of his disciples was instantly changed into admiration of his almighty power, and gratitude for their preservation.

CHAP. VII.

CHRIST AND THE DEMONIAK.

AFTER our Saviour had thus shown his disciples the dominion he had over the elements, in calming the sea and hushing the winds at his word, he likewise discovered to them the unlimited authority which he had over unclean spirits, by delivering many unhappy persons who were possessed by them, and restoring them to the blessings of health and society. Amongst these afflicted men, there was one who, by the fury of the spirit by which he was possessed, was driven from his habitation, and took up his constant abode amongst the tombs and such desolate and solitary places, going naked; his disease being so extremely violent, that he could not endure to wear clothes. When in this dreadful state, endeavours were made to tie and confine him; but he broke all cords. Even chains were insufficient to withstand the

strength of this unfortunate and distracted creature; so that he could not be tamed, and none could approach him without the utmost danger. He wept, therefore, day and night; and from the gloomy recesses which he had chosen for his habitation, he sent forth continually such fearful shrieks and dismal howlings, as filled all who heard him with terror and dismay. He also disfigured and cut himself with sharp pieces of stone. In short, the place where he dwelt was become so dangerous to all people, that no one durst to pass that way.

But, notwithstanding this outrageous behaviour, as soon as he saw our Saviour, though at a great distance off, he ran to meet him; and, changing his brutish fierceness into adoration, he fell prostrate on the ground, saying, with a loud voice, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of the most high God? I beseech thee, torment me not."

Our Saviour asked this wretched creature his name; not from ignorance of it, but, probably, to fill all who heard it with fear and admiration at the amazing extent of the disease he was afflicted with. He was answered by the evil spirit with which the man was possessed, that he was called Legion, because they were many: and the spirits entreated our Lord, that, if he cast them out of this man, he would per-

mit them to enter into a great herd of swine, which were feeding not far off. This request being granted, the whole herd, terrified beyond control, ran violently down a steep rock, and perished in the sea.

The possessed man was from that moment perfectly cured, and again restored to society, his family, and friends. And the whole town being gathered together at the news of this miracle, saw him, though so furious heretofore, now as meek as a lamb, lying at our Saviour's feet, and humbly requesting to follow wheresoever he went, in gratitude to his mighty deliverer. Our Lord, however, would not allow the poor man to follow him, but sent him back to his own house, to declare the favour which God had shown him; thus teaching us, the thankfulness it is our duty to render to God before men, for the mercies we have received from him.

CHAP. VIII.

THE MIRACLES OF OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST.

CHRIST being come down from a mountain, where he had collected his disciples together, and had

delivered to them a sermon, which contained all the established rules of Christian morality, afterwards wrought various miracles, which are fully related in the New Testament, and of which the following are a part.

The first who approached him after his descent from the mountain, was a person afflicted with the leprosy, who, as soon as he saw Jesus, acknowledged him for his Saviour, and, in the fulness of his belief in his power, said to him, with a humility which his outward deportment fully testified, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Our Lord had compassion on him, and stretching out his hand to him, said: "I will: be thou clean." Having thus healed this man, he forbade him to make it known; and proceeded on his way to Capernaum, where he soon after arrived. A centurion, or Roman military officer, who resided there, was at that time extremely troubled at the illness of a faithful servant, who was supposed to be at the point of death. The centurion, on hearing of the arrival of our Saviour in Capernaum, lost no time in sending some Jews to him, to entreat that he would come and heal his valuable servant, who lay in such extreme danger.

The Jews who came to him with this earnest request from the centurion, urged, in commend-

ation of the petitioner, that he had built them a synagogue. Our Saviour yielded to their solicitations, and went with them to the house where this sick man lay. But as he drew near, the centurion, who had a more profound veneration for our Saviour than all the Jews had, sent his most intimate friend to him, to entreat that he would not take the trouble of coming to his house, he being unworthy of so great an honour; and he further said, that it was for the same reason he had not presumed to wait upon our Saviour himself, for he well knew it needed no more than for him to speak the word, and that his servant would be healed. Our blessed Lord, though he entered not the centurion's house, yet he cured the servant, and restored him again to his master's service.

After healing many sick persons, our Saviour performed what was still more surprising, the miracle of recalling the dead to life. This was first exemplified in the raising to life a young girl of twelve years of age, the daughter of a ruler of the synagogue, named Jairus. Another instance of the same kind we read of in the Gospel, which is more particularly described. For when our Saviour went into the city of Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great crowd of people, he was met at the gates of the town by a funeral procession, bearing the body

of a young man to be buried. He was the son of a widow, and had been the support and comfort of her life. She was lamenting his loss with the most heartfelt sorrow, when our Saviour, moved with compassion at a sight so distressing, drew near to her, and comforted her. The afflicted mother had not spoken to him, but, by his requesting her to hold her peace, she fully expected his blessed assistance in this her great distress. Nor was she deceived in her expectation; for stepping forward to those that carried the body, he touched the bier whereupon the young man lay, and bid him arise. And the young man immediately arose, and Jesus delivered him to his mother, whose joy and gratitude, for this restoration of her beloved son, it is more easy to conceive than describe.

The fame of these miracles, together with others which our Saviour wrought, spreading over all parts, the disciples of John informed their master of them. John the Baptist was then in prison, where he had been sent by Herod. This holy man was himself fully persuaded that Christ was the true Messias; but being anxious to convince his own followers of the truth, he sent them to him, requesting to know whether he were indeed the prophet the world had been so long expecting. Our Lord, knowing that the disciples of John did in a man-

ner envy him, as excelling their master, instead of giving them a direct answer, which might have been liable to the objection of "his bearing record of himself," referred them to the miracles which they had seen him do. And he told them, that when they should communicate to their master an account of those things, then would he be able to judge who he was.

But, though many were hardened and slow to be reformed from the evil of their ways, the example of Mary Magdalene will prove, that the worst of sinners may repent and be forgiven. For this penitent female, full of contrition for the sins of her past life, knowing that our Saviour had entered the house of Simon the Pharisee, to eat there, came running to him; and though there were so many witnesses of her humiliation, she threw herself at the feet of our Saviour, embraced them, kissed them, bathed them with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head. Thus she availed herself of this opportunity to employ the beautiful tresses which adorned her head, in a manner well suited to prove how completely the folly of vanity was conquered in her heart.

It was customary, in those times, especially at grand entertainments, to make use of costly perfumes and ointments; though such perfumes were mostly used on the head, and seldom on

the feet: but the latter being a token of greater humility, was doubtless the reason why Mary Magdalene, on this occasion, anointed the feet of our Saviour with a very precious and fragrant ointment, testifying, to the utmost of her ability, her reverence, love, and submission to the divine person before whom she had thus prostrated herself.

One of the Pharisees, who was present at this entertainment, knew Mary Magdalene, and had also been informed of the irregularity of her former life, which had excluded her from the company of virtuous people; and he began to doubt of our Saviour's being a prophet, as he appeared to the Pharisee to be ignorant of the character of the woman who was making so free with him; and he felt assured, that if Jesus had known it, he would instantly have forbidden her his presence.

But our Lord thought fit to correct the mistake of this doctor of the law, by showing him how much he preferred the humble love of this sinner, to the pride of those who conceived themselves free from offence. He further declared, that the multitude of her sins were forgiven, in consequence of her faith and love; and he sent away the repentant Magdalene in peace and joy.

The conversion of Mary Magdalene shows

us, that the worst of sinners may find favour in the sight of God, when their repentance is sincere; but this can only be proved by a humble deportment, and a thorough reformation of life.

CHAP. IX.

THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

THOUGH our Saviour's fame was spread throughout all parts, yet Nazareth, the country where he chiefly resided, showed more unbelief than all the rest of Judea. The Nazarenes could not reconcile themselves to believe what was said concerning the great things which he did, when they beheld his person, and reflected on his condition in life. They saw, on one hand, his poverty, and the mean situation of his mother and kindred; and, on the other hand, they heard of the wonderful miracles which he had performed, and the praise and applause that followed from the people in general. In fine,

the pride of these people was hurt: they were offended by the extraordinary fame which the works of our Saviour had acquired. In consequence of this prejudice, they formed the desperate resolution of precipitating him from the top of the mountain on which their town stood. But his hour was not yet come, neither was it in the power of man to hasten it; so he imperceptibly passed away through the midst of them, and by this means rendered their wicked design ineffectual. And as he well comprehended the aversion which the people of Nazareth entertained against him, he would not preach there; but went into Capernaum, and other towns in its vicinity.

Soon after leaving Nazareth, our Saviour had news brought him of the cruel death of John the Baptist, the particulars of which are as follows.

Herod had always possessed a great veneration for John, on account of the amiable and inoffensive tenor of his life; yet John often reproved him for having married Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, which, he said, was unlawful. Herodias was highly offended at John for his thus reproving her husband; and she influenced the king to throw this bold reformer into prison, from which, in her heart, she determined he never should be released, until her

revenge was fully completed by his death. She made no doubt she should soon be able to accomplish this wicked design, and in its success her most sanguine hopes were realized.

The birthday of the king being arrived, he made a magnificent entertainment, at which all the grandees of his court were present. On this occasion, the daughter of Herodias danced before the assembly, to contribute to their amusement. She greatly excelled in this accomplishment, and so much delighted king Herod by her performance, that he desired of her to ask of him whatever she pleased, and he would give it to her, if it amounted to one half of his kingdom. The young woman went instantly to consult her mother as to what demand she should make. And there can be no doubt she was greatly disappointed and surprised, when she found that her mother preferred gratifying her cruel and unjust revenge against John the Baptist, beyond any allurements which the king's unrestrained promise gave to the acquirement of additional riches or honours for her daughter, who was the king's niece. But instead of these, Herodias enjoined her to ask nothing further of the king, than the head of John the Baptist.

The king, when he heard this extraordinary request, was as much troubled as he was sur-

prised; little imagining that the desire of a young girl, like his niece, whose youthful inclination he could only have supposed would lead her to make some request consistent with the wishes inspired by her time of life, and he was truly grieved by a demand so totally different from what he had expected. He did not doubt that this was the instruction of her mother; yet he knew not how to avoid the fulfilment of his promise. His esteem and respect for John were great; but the infatuation of Herodias, and the disgrace attendant on the king failing in his word, at length prevailed over his good intentions to the captive prophet, and he sent an order to the prison for his execution. The head of John was, therefore, according to the king's order, cut off in prison, and delivered to the daughter of Herodias in a charger, and she immediately went and took it to her mother.

Thus did this truly great man die; and notwithstanding the high opinion Herod had formed of him for sanctity and innocence, he became at length no less than his murderer. In compliance with a false principle of honour, he committed the greater sin to avoid the lesser; by consenting to the death of a good and innocent man, rather than contradict the bad designs and revengeful wishes of a worthless and artful woman.

CHAP. X.

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

AFTER the numerous miracles related in the Gospel, and the different effects produced by them on the minds of the various people who saw them, many were the Jews who came to our Saviour to ask him questions, to discover, from his answers, whether his opinions respecting the law were correct or otherwise, according to their notions. Amongst these, a doctor of the law came to him, and, by way of ensnaring him into some unguarded expression, which might subject him to suspicion and reproach, asked him, which was the first and greatest commandment of the law. Our Lord answered in these few impressive words, that we should "love God with all our hearts, and our neighbours as ourselves." Then the doctor, still anxious to find some fault in our Saviour's discourse, asked him again: "Who are our neigh-

bours?" when our Lord returned an answer in this parable.

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and on his way he fell amongst thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, wounded him, and left him half dead on the bare ground. It so happened that a priest came that way, and though he plainly saw the man in that dreadful distress, and nearly expiring from want of assistance, yet, without further notice, he passed on on the other side. A Levite likewise passed by, and beheld this sad spectacle with as little concern as the priest had done before him; both showing, in this instance, that though they were ministers of religion, their hearts were destitute of humanity and tenderness. At last a Samaritan, (which implied a pagan and idolater,) passing near this place in his journey, saw the poor man, and was moved with compassion towards him: he went up to him with a heart full of charity and benevolence, raised him up, and supported him in his arms; and finding that he was dreadfully wounded, he carefully bound up the wounds which he discovered, first pouring into them wine and oil, which he knew to be an efficacious remedy. And when his patient became a little restored, he placed him upon his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and there took the utmost care of him. And

on the morrow, when his own business compelled him to depart, he took out of his pocket two pence, (two shekels, which, in the Jewish coin, amounted to nearly five shillings,) and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, at the same time, "Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

Having thus spoken, our Saviour demanded of the doctor, who of these three men had been the neighbour of him who fell amongst the thieves. To which the doctor answered, "that it was he who had compassion on him." "Go, then," replied our Lord, "and do thou likewise."

This beautiful parable furnishes the finest precepts of charity, compassion, and tenderness, that can be met with. It teaches us to be always ready to succour those whom we see in misery; and to spare neither cares, nor pains, nor cost, where occasions of real distress are presented to our view. We likewise learn from it, that when such an object calls upon our humanity for relief, then every man becomes the neighbour of his fellow-creature. And the happy feeling which the heart will experience, in the recollection of having faithfully performed the dictates both of nature and Christianity, is a reward amply satisfactory, and a sufficient recompense for the action.

CHAP. XI.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

OUR blessed Saviour was frequently engaged in discourses to his disciples and followers, tending to inculcate every moral virtue into the hearts of those who listened to him; and he often spoke of the advantages of sincere repentance, and exhorted them to it by the most pleasing comparisons and agreeable allegories. The willingness with which the Almighty receives back into his favour the truly penitent sinner, he exemplified in the parable of a shepherd, who, having found his lost sheep, rejoiced more over that than over all the rest of his flock, which had never strayed from the fold; and also in the excessive delight expressed by the woman, who, having lost a piece of money, was in great trouble till she had again found it; but when, after a long search, she did find it, she invited all her neighbours to rejoice with her on her happy recovery of the lost treasure.

But the most lively and delightful instance of this nature, is the account of the prodigal son, which our Saviour has thus related.

A certain man had two sons, of whom he was extremely fond. The younger, who appears to have been a restless and unsteady young man, earnestly desired his father to put him in immediate possession of that portion of his property which he was to have, and to permit him to travel. To this proposition the father consented, though not without many fears respecting the danger his beloved son was about to expose himself to, when thus removed from his father's protection. However, he did not oppose him, and, shortly after, the young man took his journey into a far distant country; where, forgetful of the prudent caution that his affectionate father had given him, he wasted his time and his money in all kinds of vain and foolish pursuits, and never, till too late, reflected on the unhappy consequences which must inevitably follow.

At last, after having spent all his patrimony, a great famine arose in the land where he had fixed his abode, and want began to oppress him most severely. He now called to remembrance the advice of his good father, and reproached himself for not having attended to it better. But poverty compelled him to think

of adopting some means to support his wretched life; and no other situation offering to him, he was constrained to serve one of the inhabitants of the country, who sent him into the fields to feed swine. This was as degrading an office as could possibly be imagined: but he was obliged to submit to it; for his hunger was so great, that, although he earnestly desired to eat of the same food which the hogs devoured, yet no one would give it to him.

In this distressing situation, the recollection of former times occurred to his mind. He sighed at the remembrance of the plenty of his father's table, and even thought of the happy situation of his hired servants, who were so amply provided for by the goodness and opulence of their master, while he was famishing with hunger. These reflections made him resolve to quit this miserable state of servitude and want; to go back to his father, to acknowledge the faults and follies he had been guilty of, and to entreat his compassion and forgiveness.

Thus determined, he immediately set out for his father's house; and it so happened, that even when he was yet afar off from the house, his father, with great joy, saw him returning home; and being moved with tenderness for him, as he observed his altered appearance and the wretchedness of his apparel, he ran for-

ward to meet him. He then affectionately embraced him, and, though he appeared in so degraded a state, he was not ashamed to acknowledge him for his son; the joy he experienced in thus possessing him again, causing him to suppress the resentment he might naturally have felt at his imprudent and even wicked conduct.

This young man being then fully sensible of the great offence he had committed, and of the ingratitude of his conduct to so indulgent a parent, in the deepest contrition said: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

But the tender father, to re-establish him in his former condition of a son, commanded his servants to bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; to put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and likewise to bring forth the fatted calf and kill it, that they might eat and be merry. "For this my son," said he, "was dead, and is now alive again: he was lost, and he is found. And they began to rejoice."

During all this time, the eldest son had been in the field, employed in his usual occupation of husbandry; but now, returning home, as he drew nigh the house he heard the sound of music and dancing; upon which he called one

of the servants to him, and asked him what was the occasion of this mirth and gladness. The servant answered him, that his brother was come home, and that his father had killed the fatted calf, for joy at his return. When the elder brother heard this, he was very angry. Thinking his father had treated him unkindly, he refused to go in; upon which his father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father in these words: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither at any time transgressed I thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son was come, who has riotously devoured thy living, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

Then the father answered, "Son, thou art always with me, and all that I have is thine: yet it is meet that we should rejoice; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

CHAP. XII.

OUR SAVIOUR'S ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

OUR Lord having left Jericho, advanced towards the city of Jerusalem; and six days before the passover, he went into Bethany, where Mary, the sister of Lazarus, whom Christ had raised from the dead, received him with joy, and made a supper for him; whilst Martha served, but Lazarus sat at table with him. Then Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard, which was very costly, and anointed the feet of our Saviour with it, and wiped them with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. But Judas, one of the disciples of our Lord, who bore the bag, was very angry on seeing such a waste, as he grudgingly thought it, of so expensive a drug; and he said, it might have been sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor. But our Lord commended the action, and said that Mary had done it against the day of his burial; and that

the poor they had always with them, but him they had not.

The next morning, our Saviour being near the city, sent his disciples from the Mount of Olives to a neighbouring village, ordering them to loose an ass with her foal, which they would find standing together, and to bring them both away; and to any one who might offer to hinder them from doing so, they were to answer, "that the Lord had need of them." The disciples did as they were commanded; and having spread their garments on the ass, they placed him on its back; which action fully accorded with what the Scripture had formerly foretold: "That the King of Sion should enter the city, sitting on an ass's colt."

When the people who were come to Jerusalem on account of the passover heard that our Saviour was about entering into the city, they took branches of palm in their hands, and went before him, with loud acclamations of joy. Many spread their garments on the ground, whilst others strewed the road with branches of palm, crying before him in a triumphant manner: "Hosannah! blessed is the King of Israel, that cometh in the name of the Lord."

But these applauses and acclamations served to increase the hatred of his enemies the Pharisees, and caused them to consult amongst

themselves, saying: "What shall we do?" for all the people crowded after him. And the Pharisees determined against his life.

CHAP. XIII.

THE LAST SUPPER.

Our blessed Saviour had now finished all the discourses which he thought necessary to deliver to the people who followed him; and there remaining two days to the feast of the passover, he commanded his disciples to prepare all things in order to it. Now the chief priests and scribes among the Jews, fearing the people might become converts to our Saviour's doctrines, sought how they might kill him; and for this purpose they bribed Judas to betray his master to them. The time of eating the passover being now come, our Lord's disciples had prepared a large room, agreeably to his injunction; and Jesus being seated amongst them, he declared to them the great desire he had to celebrate the passover with them. After they

had eaten the lamb, according to the prescription of the law of Moses, Jesus took water in a basin, and washed his disciples' feet; then wiped them with a towel with which he had girded himself; and he finished this great act of humility with these words: "I have given you an example, which every one, that will be my disciple, must follow."

Being seated again with the twelve disciples, Jesus said, "Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." At these words they were exceedingly sorrowful, and began every one to say unto him, "Lord, is it I?" Our Saviour answered: "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me." Then Judas said: "Master, is it I?" Our Saviour answered: "Thou hast said." And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took the cup, and giving thanks, gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it." He then distributed it with his own hands to all of them, not even refusing to offer it to Judas, as he had done to all the others; though he so well knew his treachery, and that, even in that very hour, he intended to betray him to his enemies. Notwithstanding this kindness, Judas still continued in his unrelenting determination of betraying his master;

for, when all the other disciples were dismayed and dejected beyond measure by what our Saviour had intimated, that one of his own followers should betray him, each tremblingly enquiring, whether he was the man, Judas had the boldness and turpitude to ask the same question, knowing, as he did, not only his wicked designs, but that already he had entered into a confederacy against him. Immediately after, he went forth to put his execrable intention into execution; and the time being fully come for the accomplishment of his purpose, he no longer delayed the horrid deed.

After Judas was gone out, our Saviour began a most affecting discourse with his disciples, respecting the sufferings he was about to endure; and which, he told them, were to begin that very night. He foretold their unfaithfulness, in leaving him in his greatest distress, which he was assured they would do. He then addressed himself to Peter in particular, and told him, that he, above all, had been in the power of the evil tempter of mankind; but that he had prayed to his Father for him. Still he feared that the frailty of Peter's nature would occasion him to fall into the snares of the enemy.

But this apostle, instead of humbling himself at the warning which had thus condescendingly

been given him, showed himself too confident in his own strength and integrity, and answered boldly: "Though all men should be offended of thee, yet will I never be offended;" and he added, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and unto death." Then Jesus answered him, "Verily, I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice."

Though the prediction of his fall was insufficient to humble Peter, yet, when it did occur, he most severely lamented it. And this should serve as a lesson to teach us never to be too sure of our own unassisted strength to resist temptation; as we know so little of ourselves in reality, that none can tell with certainty in what manner he will act, when any particular emergency calls upon him to exert his fortitude, his patience, or his compassion.

CHAP. XIV.

OF OUR SAVIOUR'S AGONY IN THE GARDEN.

OUR Lord having delivered a number of instructions to his disciples during their last

melancholy meeting, went out, accompanied by them, for the purpose of going to the mount of Olives; and being come to a place called Gethsemane, he caused most of his disciples to remain there, that he might go into a garden not far off, to pray, as was his usual custom. It was well known to Judas that his master frequently went to this place to pray; and as he had no doubt of meeting him there, he fixed upon that opportunity of putting his plan in execution.

Our Lord took with him into this garden only Peter, James, and John; and being with them alone, he told them that he was in great anguish of spirit, even unto death; and therefore he desired them to watch with him, whilst he prayed. He then went from them some paces further, and falling on his face, prayed to this effect: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." After this, our Saviour came again to his disciples, and found them fast asleep. And he said to them: "Could ye not watch with me one hour? watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." But immediately after, compassionating the weakness of human nature, he added: "The spirit, indeed, is willing; but the flesh is weak." He then went

away a second time, and prayed as before ; but on returning, found them still asleep, " for their eyes were heavy." A third time our Saviour left them, and again engaged in fervent prayer ; and when he came back, and still found them unchanged in position—still sleeping as securely as ever, he said: " Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, when the son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going; he is at hand that doth betray me."

And whilst he was thus speaking, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, came, and with him a great number, with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the Jews, to take Jesus of Nazareth prisoner.

The traitor Judas had given as a sign to those who were to take our Saviour into custody, that whomsoever he should kiss, he it was whom they sought; and he advised them, without fear or delay, to take him and hold him fast. According to this agreement, the moment that wicked man beheld our Saviour, he went up to him, and said: " Hail, master ; and kissed him." And immediately on this signal, they laid violent hands on him and took him away. And those who first got hold of him led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, who questioned him very particularly, as to " whether he

was in truth the Son of God, or no." The answers he received so much offended and surprised the priest, that he turned to the multitude, to ask them what punishment they thought our Saviour deserved, for his presumption in calling himself the Son of God; and they answered: "He is guilty of death."

Peter, in the mean time, full of astonishment at all that had taken place, and seeing his master thus taken prisoner, followed him afar off, to see what would be the consequence; and not expecting to attract any particular notice amongst so many, went into the hall of the high priest, and sat down amongst the servants. But he had not been long there, before a damsel passed, and noticing him, said: "And thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee." But he denied it before them all, and said, that he knew no such person.

He then removed into the porch of the palace, when another maid saw him, and likewise made the same remark, that he belonged to the prisoner; and again, in the most vehement manner, he disclaimed all knowledge of him. And not long after, a third person accused him of being one of the followers of Christ. At this he became violently angry, protesting that he knew not the man they mentioned; when immediately the cock crew. Then it was that

Peter remembered the words of our Saviour, which were now fulfilled: his heart smote him with sincere sorrow for his cruelty in thus denying so good a master, and he went out and wept bitterly.

CHAP. XV.

CHRIST'S ARRAIGNMENT.

OUR blessed Saviour being thus in the hands of the Jews, was carried before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. Annas particularly questioned him respecting his doctrines and his disciples. He replied, that he had not taught in secret, so that he might be well informed by every body in that matter. But this freedom of speech displeasing an officer who stood near our Saviour, he gave him a blow on the face, and asked him, whether it became him to answer the high priest in that manner. Christ suffered this indignity with divine patience and forbearance, and only requested the person who had

thus insulted him, to point out what he had said that was disrespectful or wrong. After this examination, Annas sent him to Caiaphas, at whose house all the chief priests were assembled, to confer about the charges they were to exhibit against him, and, if it should be thought necessary, to find false witnesses; but when such were brought forward, they could not make out sufficient evidence to affect his life. At last, one of them accused him of having said he could destroy the temple, and build it again in three days. Our Saviour made no answer to this accusation; when the high priest arose, and most solemnly adjured him, in the name of the most high God, to tell them if he were indeed the Christ. "Though I should tell you," answered our Saviour, "ye will not believe me, neither will ye let me go: but hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

The high priest no sooner heard these words, than he rent his clothes, and cried out: "He hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy: what think ye?" They all answered: "He is guilty of death." Then the rough and unfeeling soldiers began to use him ill; for they struck him, bound him, and

derided him in the most shameful manner. Thus passed this dreadful night; and in the morning, they led him to Pilate, to demand judgment against him.

Pilate asked the Jews, what were the crimes which they laid to the charge of the prisoner. But the Jews answered confusedly, unable to bring forward any thing against him; and only said, that if he had not been a wicked man, they should not have brought him before him.

Pilate not having been accustomed to judge people upon such slight grounds, would have delivered him into their hands again, that they might deal with him according to their own law. To satisfy Pilate, they then brought forward a number of false witnesses, who accused him of numerous offences against the public peace; but none of the charges exhibited even by these people, appeared of sufficient weight to procure his condemnation. Pilate being a Roman governor, was not prejudiced with malice against the person of our Saviour as the Jews were; he therefore easily discovered his innocence, and went to the Jews again, to tell them that he found him in no way culpable. But this answer did not satisfy the people, who were eagerly bent on his death; and he was constrained to return to his judgment-seat and

question him again. But our Saviour maintained a deep silence, whatever were the charges of his accusers; and the judge was greatly astonished to find that he did not defend himself against his cruel enemies.

Pilate having been informed that our Saviour came from Galilee, would have made this a pretext for discharging him; and he therefore sent him to Herod, who was governor of that province, though then in Jerusalem. When Herod saw Jesus he was exceeding glad; for, having heard many wonderful things said of him, he was in hopes he would perform some miracle in his presence. Then he put several questions to our Lord, but he made no answers; at which he began to despise him, and, in mockery, arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him back to Pilate. This judge having again received our Saviour, went out a third time, in hopes of mitigating the animosity the Jews had conceived against this innocent man; saying, that he had examined him, and could find no fault in him, and that even Herod himself, to whom he had sent him, could not find him guilty of any crime.

But the Jews being fully determined to put our Lord to death, showed, by the uproar they made, how greatly they disapproved of the de-

cision which Pilate was desirous to make in his favour. Pilate, therefore, unwilling to cause a tumult, and wishing to calm the growing rage of the multitude, condemned our Saviour to be scourged; hoping that this punishment would satisfy the revengeful spirit subsisting against him, and prevent their further urging his condemnation to death.

When Judas, contrary to his expectation, saw how far the persecutors of his most innocent master carried their malice and their indignation against him, he became fully sensible of the wickedness he had committed; and the trouble he felt on account of it drove him to despair. In this state of mind he went to the chief priests and elders, and took back the thirty pieces of silver he had received from them. He told them how greatly he had sinned in betraying innocent blood; and that he would no longer retain the price of his guilt. They answered him, "What is that to us? See thou to that." Judas then threw the money back into the temple, and went out and hanged himself. Such is the end of ingratitude and covetousness; such is the reward of perfidy and treason. It is cheap in its offers, momentary in possession, unsatisfactory in consequence, horrid in remembrance, and ruinous in the event.

CHAP. XVI.

OUR SAVIOUR'S SENTENCE.

PILATE having thus delivered Jesus up to the soldiers, they added cruel mockery to the punishment of scourging; and in derision they clothed him in a purple robe, put a crown of thorns upon his head, and a reed in his hand by way of a sceptre; they then bowed the knee before him, and said: "Hail, king of the Jews." In addition to this insulting behaviour, they buffeted and abused him so cruelly, that Pilate imagined that showing him to the people in such a state would soften their hard hearts, in consideration of what he had already suffered, and prevent their further thirst after his blood. But in this expectation Pilate was deceived and disappointed; for as soon as he had presented Christ to them, and said, "Behold the man," there arose such cries and clamours amongst all there, that discomposed and troubled him very much. Even his offer of delivering our

Saviour, on account of the passover, at which time it was customary to set one criminal at liberty, was by one common voice rejected; so that our blessed Saviour saw Barabbas, who was a thief, a seditious person, and a murderer, preferred before him.

The knowledge Pilate had of the innocence of our Saviour, held him in suspense and irresolution, and prevented him from blindly complying with the wish of the people, that he should be put to death. His wife also advised him not, in any manner, to be concerned in the death of that just man; for that she had been much troubled on his account, in her dreams in the night. The people, in the mean time, rather than be defeated in their purpose, endeavoured to intimidate Pilate, by representing to him that his conduct was disrespectful to the Roman emperor, in taking the part of a man who had declared himself a king, in opposition to Cæsar.

The governor, though well assured in his own heart that Jesus Christ was free from all offence, and guiltless of any crime whatever, yet, to avoid the imputation of disrespect or disloyalty, to his sovereign the emperor of Rome, at last gave way to the impetuous clamour of the Jews; but, to testify his disapprobation, and to clear himself of the murder they would force

him to commit, he caused water to be brought him, and washed his hands before them all, saying at the same time, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it." Then they all answered: "His blood be upon us, and on our children."

He then pronounced the sentence of death on our Saviour, delivering him into the hands of the Jews; while he set Barabbas at liberty, contrary to the feelings of his heart, and the suggestions of his conscience. But he had done all he could to save him; and he feared the turbulence of these infuriated people.

The Jews, finding that they had at length conquered the scruples of Pilate, and got our Saviour into their power, proceeded to put into execution the cruel sentence they had with so much difficulty obtained. And their fury not admitting of delay, they instantly loaded him with the cross, and made him thus depart out of Jerusalem, to go to mount Calvary, which was the place where malefactors generally suffered death. But seeing our blessed Saviour, whose human spirits were exhausted by suffering so many miseries, fainting under so great a burden, they constrained a man named Simon to carry it for him; and in this painful and ignominious manner was he conducted to Calvary, attended by the insulting shouts of the people.

But a great company of people followed him, among whom were many women, who bewailed and lamented him; showing, by their sighs and tears, the sense they had of his sufferings. Our Saviour observing them, spoke to them, and to them only, saying: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but rather for yourselves and your children;" thus predicting the destruction which should afterwards overwhelm that noble city.

CHAP. XVII.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

OUR Saviour being arrived at mount Calvary, the place where he was to finish the great work of man's redemption, was offered vinegar mixed with gall to drink; but, on tasting it, he refused to drink. At length they stripped him of his raiment, and nailed him to the cross, between two thieves, who were executed at the same time. But as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth to complain of ill treatment or cruelty; but he prayed for

his persecutors, saying: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The people, however, still continued to gaze at him and mock him; the rulers and chief priests also reproached him with having been able to save others, though he could not save himself. The soldiers likewise mixed their scoffs with the rest, in the most cruel and insulting manner; and even one of the malefactors who suffered with him, railed at him and said, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." But the other of these unhappy criminals became enlightened and converted; and he rebuked his companion, saying, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation." At the same time he reminded him, that they suffered justly for their numerous crimes, but that Jesus had committed no offence against any; and he finished, by entreating our Lord to remember him when he came to his kingdom. Our Saviour, in answer to him, said, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise;" and, no doubt, this assurance alleviated his sufferings, and caused him to die in faith and hope of future felicity.

About the sixth hour, there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour, at which time our Saviour cried out with a loud voice, in words which those who were standing there

did not understand; and complaining of thirst, they again offered him vinegar, which he tasted. And now, knowing that he had fully accomplished all things, to the most minute circumstance which had been foretold by the prophets concerning him, he firmly recommended his soul into the hands of his Father, and meekly bowing his head, he yielded up the ghost.

Our blessed Saviour having thus finished his work on the cross, there happened several wonderful events, which began to make the Jews sensible of the crime they had committed.

The heavens, as before mentioned, were overspread with a thick darkness for three hours; the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom; the earth quaked; the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; the dead bodies of many saints arose, and appeared to several persons in Jerusalem.

So many extraordinary signs made the centurion who commanded the soldiers that were to watch our Saviour, say, "Truly, this was the Son of God." The rest, who were spectators of this dismal scene, frightened at such prodigies, said the same: they changed their insultings into sighs and tears of remorse and contrition; and smiting their breasts in sorrow, returned home.

The soldiers broke the legs of the thieves who

were crucified, that they might die the sooner, and be taken down from the cross before the Sabbath. "They broke not the legs of Jesus, because he was already dead; but a soldier pierced his side with a spear, and there issued blood and water."

Joseph, of Arimathea, a rich man, went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. This being granted, he wrapped it in clean linen, with spices, laid it in his own new tomb, and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre. Lest his followers should steal away the body, and report that he had risen from the dead, the Jews desired Pilate to set a guard of soldiers about the sepulchre; and that they might know if the tomb had been opened, they sealed the stone that was rolled to the door of it.

CHAP. XVIII.

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

EARLY on the first day of the week, after these events, there was a great earthquake; when an angel rolled away the stone which had been placed at the door of the sepulchre, and

sat upon it: "his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow; the keepers shook for fear; and Jesus rose and departed."

The first notice the apostles of Christ had of his resurrection, was early in the morning after the sabbath; when some good women came to bring spices and ointments, to anoint the body; and they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, and an angel told them that "Jesus was risen," and bid them go tell his disciples.

Peter and John then went to the sepulchre, and found the linen clothes and the napkin, in which the body had been wrapped, and were convinced that "Jesus was risen."

When the guards told the chief priests what was done, the priests and elders bribed them largely to say, that, while they fell asleep, "his disciples came by night, and stole him away."

Jesus appeared, after his resurrection, first to Mary Magdalene; afterwards to two disciples going to Emmeus; then to the apostles assembled, without Thomas: and all this on the day of his resurrection.

A week after, when Thomas was with them, Jesus stood in the midst of them again, when the doors were shut; and he bid Thomas see and feel the marks of the nails in his hands, and of the spear in his side, and rebuked his unbelief. Then Thomas, with surprise and joy, acknow-

ledged him: he broke out into a rapture of zeal and worship, and said to him, "My Lord, and my God!"

Another time he showed himself to them at the sea of Tiberias. Some of the disciples went a fishing, and caught nothing all night: in the morning Jesus stood on the shore, and bid them "cast the net on the right side of the ship: and they took a multitude of fishes."

As soon as they knew it was the Lord, Peter cast himself into the sea; and when they were come to the shore, they ate some broiled fish, and Jesus did eat with them.

Jesus reproved Peter for his want of love to him, and for denying his master, by asking him three times whether he loved him or not: and then he foretold that Peter should love him so well as to suffer and die for his sake.

He appeared to the apostles again on the mountain in Galilee. Jesus appointed them to meet him there; when he told them that all power in heaven and earth was given into his hands: he gave them their commission to preach the gospel to all nations; and promised his presence with them, and a power to work miracles for the vindication of their doctrine.

Jesus afterwards met his disciples near Jerusalem, and led them out as far as to Mount Olivet, near Bethany. He bid them to tarry at Jerusalem till the promised Spirit should fall upon them; he repeated their commission; appointed them to be witnesses for him in the world; and, "having blessed them, he ascended into heaven in a bright cloud; and appeared to five hundred brethren at once."

While they were gazing towards heaven, two angels appeared, and assured them, that they should see him return in the same manner as he had ascended.

Upon which the disciples worshipped Christ when he ascended to heaven, and "returned to Jerusalem with great joy, praising God."

THE END.

Harvey, Darton, and Co. Printers,
Gracechurch-Street, London.

